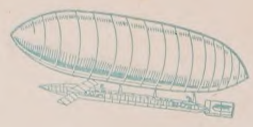
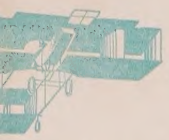
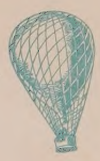



The Boy Railroader



By
Matthew
White, Jr.





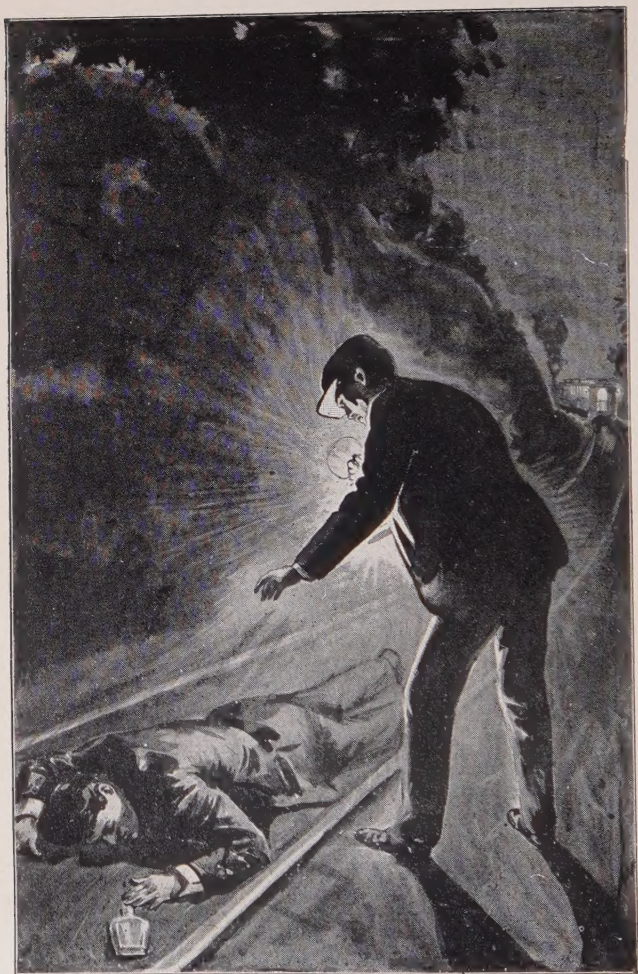


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THE RED GLARE SHONE ON THE FACE OF WEBB HILLMAN.

THE BOY RAILROADER

OR

The Triumphs of a Young Flagman

AN ENTERTAINING AND INSTRUCTIVE STORY
FOR BOYS

BY

MATHEW WHITE, JR.

Author of "My Mysterious Fortune", "Adventures
of a Young Athlete", "The Young Editor",
"A Publisher at Fifteen", Etc.

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THE YOUNG FLAGMAN.

CHAPTER I.

ROBERT MARSTON'S DISAPPOINTMENT.

It was a crisp, sunshiny morning in early autumn, just the weather for walking. There had been a shower during the night, so there was no dust, and the rain had not been heavy enough to make mud. Birds sang in the trees, a rippling brook ran musically alongside the road, and all around was a picturesque vision of rolling meadow and upland, backed in the distance by the blue haze of a range of hills.

There was but one person in sight to enjoy all this, and he seemed to be doing anything else but that. He was a tallish lad of seventeen or perhaps more, with broad shoulders and well knit figure. His face a passer by just at present could not see, as he walked along with head bent toward the ground, although not in the eager, expectant attitude of one who is hoping to find something with every step taken in advance.

"Hullo, Rob! Can't you look up and nod to a fellow?"

A boy's voice broke the silence, coming from the front door yard of a farmhouse close to the road which the other was just passing. The owner of the voice, a freckle-faced lad of sixteen, wearing a broad-brimmed straw hat, a blue checked shirt, and well patched trousers dropped his rake and came out to the fence to shake hands with his friend.

"Why, what is the matter with you, Rob?" he added. "You look clean tuckered out or something."

"Yes, George, it's something with a big S," and Rob Marston dropped down on the grass by the roadside and pulling up a blade began to draw it savagely back and forth between his teeth. "I've been over to Griggsville. You remember about Fielder, the *Record* man, promising me a place there this fall? Now he's just invested in a type-setting machine and is discharging some of his old help instead of taking on new ones."

"Well, you know I always said a prince in disguise oughtn't to soil his hands with printer's ink," laughed George Frame, making a mock obeisance.

"Oh, come now, George, when are you going to give over that nonsense?" and the other looked half annoyed.

"Why should it be nonsense?" persisted George. "You know you're not own brother to Dick and Sadie Marston, don't you?"

"Yes, and that's all I do know about it."

"Well, then, so long as you are not positively assured that you're *not* a prince, why may you not be that as well as anything else?"

"It certainly looks as if I was not going to be anything at all just at present," broke out Rob, the gloomy look coming back to his face. "And I *must* get something to do this fall. With the peach and apple crops both a failure, the place isn't going to bring us in much; and now, since Dick's sold off the east corner to Dr. Train, he doesn't really need my help on the farm. And I'll go on tramp before I'll sit down at that table and not earn my salt."

A flash came into the boy's eyes as he spoke, and he sprang to his feet as if it were impossible for him to lie still and do nothing after giving forth such sentiments.

"I wish I could do something for you, Rob," said the other, turning serious. "But with all us boys, there's no opening here."

"I'd strike for the city and try my luck there," went on Rob, "if I hadn't read so much about the hundreds of poor chaps who are crowding in there all the time and finding everything filled. And then, you see, none of us knows anybody there, so I'd have to just literally trust to luck for getting a place. I made sure of being

taken on at Fielder's till this morning, and the way things have turned out has just broken me all up. But I mustn't keep you any longer. Good by, old fellow," and with a squeeze of the hand Marston was off.

The other stood looking after him, evidently longing to say something of an encouraging nature, but finding no foundation on which to place it.

So in an instant he turned and resumed his work, murmuring, "Poor Rob! I can just understand how he feels. I wonder what he will do!"

Meantime the subject of these reflections trudged over the road back to Westford. He had a mile and a half to go yet before reaching home, and he was wondering how he could bring himself to tell them of his non-success. He had been so confident when starting out, had told Sadie that he would not in the least mind the two-mile walk to and from his work every day. And now to think that the career to which he had looked forward all summer, ever since that day in June when Mr. Fielder had stopped at the cottage for strawberries, and had seemed to take such an interest in Rob and had promised him work if he would come over to his office in September—to think that all this was but an air castle of the past!

R—r—r—umble. Rob was distracted from his rueful meditations by the flashing past him of an express

train. The road crossed the track just at this point, and as Rob stood for a second looking after the vanishing cars, he could not but contrast his lot with that of all the beings on that train.

"Every one of them with some work to do," he told himself; "something to look forward to, while I—"

He stopped thinking for an instant, to concentrate all his attention on his eyesight, putting up a hand to shield his vision from the sun as he peered steadily along the line of rails.

"Well, that's queer," he muttered. "I was sure I saw a man walking along that track an instant ago. Now where is he? Great Scott! I believe he's fallen down across the ties!"

Taking a quick glance in either direction to make sure no more trains were coming, Rob started off on a run toward the spot where some object cut off the continuity of shining rails on the west-bound track.

Sure enough, it was a man, lying prostrate on his face. Beside him was a long iron bar, with a wrench arrangement at either end, and at sight of this Rob knew that the man must be a track-walker. And there was work for him to do, too; for just beyond him the bolt that fastened a rail to the ties had sprung, and the end of the rail was raised in menacing attitude toward the east.

"That ought to be fixed at once," thought Rob, "and here's this fellow with an apoplectic stroke, or something of the sort. What ought I to do?"

The first thing was to pull the man off the track and place him in a safer position on the grass, and this, by the exercise of a good deal of muscular power, Rob managed to do. Then the next train must be warned of the condition of the track. But how to do this?

There was no station near, but a search through the track-walker's pockets soon brought to light a square of red bunting. This Rob took out, and, standing up, he allowed it to flutter in the breeze.

He had scarcely unfolded it when he heard a sharp whistle behind him. Turning round, he saw a west-bound train slowing up.

"They'll have to take this fellow aboard," he decided, and then waited for the cars to come to a standstill.

This was accomplished within a few yards of the break in the track, and Rob hastened forward to meet the conductor and explain matters.

A gentleman with eye glasses and a brown beard speedily followed that official from the train, and heard Rob tell his story.

"You say you *found* the man unconscious?" he asked, when the boy had finished.

"Yes; he had fallen across the rails."

"Then he did not beckon you to him and say that he felt ill and ask you to stop the train and tell you how to do it?"

"No, sir."

"And you did all you have done on your own responsibility?" persisted the stranger.

"I did, sir. I hope it was all right," answered Rob, wondering what the man was after with all this cross questioning, and who he was.

For an instant the other made no reply. He was watching the brakeman and the baggage master as they carried the sick man to the baggage car; then his glance went past them and took in the engineer and fireman, who were busy over the raised rail. At last, just as Rob was about to turn away, thinking he had been forgotten, the man of the brown beard brought his eye back to the boy before him, gave his whole figure a comprehensive glance, said simply, "Come down to Chelsea any morning and ask at the station for Mr. Sumner," then turned and re-entered the car.

CHAPTER II.

BRIGHT HOPES.

Five minutes later the rear brakeman had been called in by a series of short whistles, the locomotive had again, with labored puffs, set its wheels in motion, and the train slid off over the shining rails, leaving Rob once more alone on the tracks. But how different things looked to him now! It was as if he had had a pair of glasses given him which transformed the very aspect of the country side.

Before he had thought the region rather a barren one, with rocky outcroppings in the soil and too few trees to diversify the landscape. Now the morning sunshine seemed to tinge everything with a golden hue, and as Rob strolled back to the crossing to resume his walk along the road, he stopped to pluck a cattail to swing. He positively must get something for his arms to do to help work off the excitement. The distance that still remained for him to cover before reaching home would serve to give occupation enough to his legs.

Suddenly he stopped short, and a shadow crossed the face that during the last few minutes had been so sunny.

"Perhaps they're only going to give me a reward!" he reflected. "Oh, I hope not! That would be such a come-down from getting a position."

Presently, however, the cloud cleared away.

"If it had been a reward," he told himself, "he might have asked only for my address. Besides, I'm sure I saw him take a good look at me before he spoke. He must have been measuring my height. But for what, I wonder—engineer, fireman, conductor, brakeman, baggage master, or ticket taker?"

There was no means of telling, and so overjoyed was the boy at this prospect of employment, coming to him so unexpectedly just when the outlook was so dark, that he felt he would be contented with anything.

Still, away down in the bottom of his heart, he hoped it would be something that would keep him on the cars and not at a station. He had all a true boy's passion for railroads. Down at the little house he had called home as long as he could remember, they could just hear the trains as they flew back and forth between the two great cities. And now the idea of being a part of the system, of wearing a uniform possibly, and seeing fresh sights every day of his life,

while he would be at the same time earning a livelihood—this caused Rob Marston's eyes to sparkle and put elasticity into his step.

In this mood then he came in sight of the little white house setting back from the road amid its tall maples and elms. And there was Sadie, hanging her tins on the fence to dry, with the chickens clucking about her, and Dash, the dog, lazily snapping at flies in the doorway.

It was a very humble abode, square and unbeautiful in its lines, with the paint sadly worn, and some of the boards rotting with age. But it was Rob's home for all that, and he loved it, and "I wonder if I shall have to leave it" was the thought that flashed across him now, as he strode up the lane to the barnyard and swung his cap gaily to Sadie.

She dropped the pan with a clatter to clap her hands and cry out joyfully:

"Oh, Rob, you've got it! I'm so glad. Come in the kitchen and tell me all about it while I peel the potatoes."

"Well, there's a lot to tell," replied Rob, as he picked up the pan, "but it isn't about what you expect. Fielder doesn't want me now. He's going to have a machine do his work."

"Why, Rob," and the girl threw her whole heart

into her eyes and voice. "I thought surely you had been successful when I saw your face."

"So I have, but not in the way either you or I expected. I don't know whether I ought to say anything about it yet or not; everything's so indefinite, but of course I can't keep you in suspense now," and thereupon Rob told of his adventure in crossing the railroad track and of the hopes he built on Mr. Sumner's parting speech, not omitting the close scrutiny to which he had been subjected.

"There, I told you to let it be, and now see the luck that's come to you by taking my advice!" exclaimed Sadie.

"Let it be! Let what be?" ejaculated Rob, with a mystified look.

"Why that, to be sure," returned the girl, laughingly laying her finger for an instant on the tiny stretch of down that gave a golden tinge to the boy's upper lip. "If it wasn't for that he'd think you were too young to be employed on a railroad."

"Nonsense, Sadie, I don't suppose he ever saw it," returned Rob, "but at the same time I'll give you due credit for the suggestion, and renew my promise not to shave anything but my chin. Where's Dick?"

"Out in the potato patch. My, won't we be proud of our railroad boy!"

These three had lived alone since the death of Mrs. Marston, two years previous, and had always been like real brothers and sister to one another. In fact, it was not until Mrs. Marston came to die that Rob knew he was not her own son. Then she started to tell how he came to them when Sadie was born, but a spasm came on before she could finish, and so the mystery was never solved.

Rob had offered to go away soon after the funeral, feeling that he had no longer a claim on the little household, but both Dick and Sadie had met this suggestion with such deep expressions of concern that such a thing should be even thought of that Rob felt as though he had been guilty of base ingratitude in making the suggestion. How matters had gone since, the reader already knows.

Every time Rob heard the rumble of a train that afternoon, while he helped Dick in the potato field, the question flashed into his mind, "What sort of work am I to be offered, I wonder?" and that evening the three discussed it till bedtime.

It was three miles to Chelsea, and promptly after breakfast the next morning Rob started to walk it. The Marstons had not owned a horse since the father's death.

Sadie stood at the corner of the lane to wave him a

last good-by just as she had done the day before, and now, as Rob turned to receive it before starting into the path across Deacon Burns' meadow lot that led straight to the turnpike, he felt that it was a good omen.

It was early, for the Marstons were always through breakfast by seven, and, as Rob was much too excited to walk slowly, he reached Chelsea before eight. On asking at the railroad station for Mr. Sumner, he was informed that that gentleman would not be at his desk for an hour yet.

But Rob was happier here, with the busy scenes about a railroad yard to watch, than he would have been waiting at home for time to start. Chelsea was the largest station on the P. C. Railway between Philadelphia and New York, and was, moreover, the junction for the branch road to Packerstown, which was quite an important line in itself.

Soon after Rob arrived and took his seat on a trunk by the baggage room, a train from New York came in, discharged its Chelsea passengers, and then went speeding on again, with the brakeman in his trim uniform standing on the rear platform, calling out salutations to his friends among the Chelsea employees as he swiftly passed them.

"I suppose I may be doing the same thing some

time," surmised Rob. "I'll remember that fellow's face, and when I get to know him will tell him with what awe I looked at him this morning. I suppose I *will* meet him sooner or later."

Rob *did* meet him soon, and never would either forget the circumstances.

CHAPTER III.

THE INTERVIEW WITH THE SUPERINTENDENT.

From his position on the trunk Rob could see the stairway that led up to Mr. Sumner's office, so that he saw that gentleman as soon as he arrived.

"I'll give him a few minutes to look over his mail," he decided, checking the impulse to spring up and follow him in immediately.

So he took a turn or two to the end of the platform and back, and then ascended the stairs and knocked at a door on which in yellow letters on a big sign was proclaimed the fact that the superintendent of the Chelsea division held forth within.

There was no answer, and then Rob did what he should have done in the first place—pushed open the door and walked in. There were several clerks busy at their desks, and in a glass partitioned room in one corner of the larger apartment, Rob saw the man of whom he was in search.

"Can I go right in to Mr. Sumner?" he asked of one of the clerks. "It would be no good for me to

send in my name, for he doesn't know it. But he expects me to come."

The clerk looked puzzled for an instant, then nodded his head and resumed his work. Rob walked over to the private office, and, halting in the doorway, said simply: "I have come, sir, as you asked me to."

He was fearful lest the other might have forgotten all about him, and it would have been rather an embarrassing task for him to have to explain all about what he had done the day before.

But Mr. Sumner would not have been a fit man for his position had he not had a good memory for faces, and, giving Rob his hand at once, he said cordially: "Good morning; glad to see you. Take a seat for a minute while I run through one letter here, then I will talk to you."

The minute did not seem sixty seconds to Rob, though in fact it was more, so busy was his brain with the possibilities that might arise out of the interview. So he had not even begun to grow impatient when Mr. Sumner wheeled around in his chair and said:

"Perhaps I need not remind you of the fact that I was wonderfully well pleased with the clear-headedness you manifested yesterday morning. I wanted to recognize it in some way and I will give you your choice between accepting a reward of fifty dollars or taking a position on the road."

"Oh, I would prefer the place by a great deal," burst forth Rob. "I was looking for work, and would rather be a railroad man than anything else."

"I thought as much," was the other's response, "but I felt that it was no more than fair to give you a choice. At the same time I don't mind telling you that a position is of much more value than a reward could be. We have more applications than places to fill, and I would not be justified in giving you a position, when your name has not been on the list, had you not done something to deserve it. Have you had any experience at all in railroading?"

"No, sir," Rob was compelled to admit.

"What schooling have you had?" was the next question.

"I have been through the entire course at the Westford district school. Graduated there when I was fifteen."

"And since then—?"

"I have been helping my brother on the farm."

"Um! out of door work—good training for the muscles," murmured Mr. Sumner. Then he added suddenly: "How old are you?"

"Eighteen, almost," answered Rob, and, try as he would, he could not keep his hands from straying to his upper lip and giving one stroke to his embryo mustache.

"Oh, indeed, only eighteen!" exclaimed the other. "I took you for twenty, at least," and the superintendent knit his brows slightly, and began to drum a little tune with his fingers on the edge of the desk.

Rob's spirits sank. Was he about to lose this golden opportunity just when he had considered that everything was settled? And all because of his age!

But he said nothing, as indeed there was nothing for him to say. The superintendent had all the facts before him, and it rested with him to make the decision.

There was an impressive silence in the room for half a minute, then Mr. Sumner looked at his watch and tapped a bell on his desk.

"See if you can find Howell and send him to me," he told the office boy who answered the summons.

"He's on the platform now, sir," was the reply. "I'll tell him to come right up."

The boy disappeared and then Mr. Sumner turned to Rob with: "Can you spare a couple of hours to take a run down to Packerstown and back?"

"Yes, indeed," Rob responded with alacrity, his hopes rising again.

"Well, then, just step into the hallway for a few minutes," returned the superintendent. "I'll send a brakeman out to you; you're to go with him, watch

closely all he does and ask all the questions you please. Of course, you will understand not to allow these to interfere with his duties. When you get back you can wait on the platform till I send for you."

"Yes, sir," and Rob passed out, just as a pleasant faced young man in the white cap and blue suit of the railroad's employees presented himself in the doorway.

This time the minutes *did* drag slowly, while our would-be railroad man waited in the hallway. What was Mr. Sumner saying to the brakeman behind his back? Giving him instructions, no doubt, to watch him closely and note whether he had good material in him or not.

Rob's meditations were interrupted by the appearance of the office boy, who put his head out of the door and announced: "I say, the boss wants to see you again for a minute."

Rob hurried back to the private room and was greeted with: "I forgot all about taking your name and address."

"Robert Marston, Westford."

"Good," said the other as he noted them down, "and now, Marston, let me make you acquainted with Sam Howell, who has served the P. C. for six years."

"Glad to know you," said Howell, extending his hand and taking that same measuring, all comprehensive glance at his new acquaintance to which Rob had already been subjected.

"Now, Marston, I'll leave you in Sam's hands till noon," added Mr. Sumner. "Good luck to you."

Rob followed his guide outside and down the stairs, where the latter pointed to a train which was just backing down to the platform.

"That's 61," he said.

"But you fellows aren't really brakemen at all any more, since they've had the Westinghouse attachment for trains, are you?" remarked Rob, with his eyes fixed on the shining silver plate affixed to the front of his companion's cap.

"No, we don't have any setting of brakes to do unless the air gives out," replied Sam, "except on the freights, and those fellows don't have any caps to have names on. So it does seem sort of mixed, doesn't it?" he added with a laugh. "But here we are. Step aboard the last car."

"Why doesn't that bell rope run from one car to the other?" asked Rob, when the train was in motion and Sam had come inside to take a seat beside him on the corner occupied in winter by the stove. "As soon as you got the signal from the conductor

you pulled the cord, but I noticed that it didn't connect with the next car."

"Well, it isn't a *bell* rope at all, but a signal *whistle*," answered the brakeman. "It is a new improvement, not yet in use on all the roads, and is a steam attachment, passing from car to car underneath the train and connecting with a whistle in the cab of the engine."

At this point loud voices were heard in the center of the car and, turning round, Rob observed two women, with broad brimmed hats and high shoulder capes, having it back and forth at one another about an open window.

"I insist that that window be closed," cried the one in the rear seat, leaning forward as though about to do this with her own hands.

"And I say that it shall stay open," affirmed she in front. "It is positively suffocating in this car, and I shall faint if I don't have air."

"And I shall catch my death of cold with a draught blowing on me," declared the other. "Besides, you are making all the rest of the passengers uncomfortable. I appeal to them."

"So do I," broke in No. 2, and both turned to their neighbors across the aisle.

But before the question could be put to vote, Sam

appeared upon the scene, and firmly but respectfully requested that the window be closed.

"If you wish air," he said, in response to the vindictive look directed at him by the lady subject to faints, "I will see if I cannot get some one in the rear to change seats with you."

This was done and all parties were satisfied.

"That is one of our hardest jobs," remarked Sam grimly, as he returned to Rob.

But he had scarcely settled himself in his seat when some one cried sharply: "Brakeman, brakeman, I can't stand that sun."

It was an old lady with a flounced silk dress and a lace bonnet trimmed with green ribbon. The train had just rounded a curve that brought that side of the car to face the east, and after frantic efforts to lower the blind herself she had called for help.

Sam promptly went to her assistance, but in spite of tugs both up and down and sharp blows of the fist the shutter obstinately resisted all efforts to make it move. And in the midst of the struggle with it the train drew up at the next station and the brakeman was forced to leave and attend to his other duties.

The old lady was very wrathful, and putting up her parasol, sat there under it, a most ludicrous object. Two or three passengers on the opposite side

of the aisle had just gotten out and Sam suggested that she change her seat, but she indignantly declined to do this, affirming that it was the company's business to see to it that their windows did not stick, and not to expect their passengers to incommode themselves.

"Do you always have as exciting a ride?" Rob wanted to know when Sam dropped into the seat next him again with a weary sigh.

"Not often. It seems as if this was all got up for your special benefit, to show you the variety of uses we fellows are put to. Hello, what's up in there, I wonder. Guess Syd needs some help. Just look out for things here a second, will you, while I step over into the next car?"

So saying, the brakeman hurried across the two platforms and entered the coach ahead, where Rob could just make out near the further door a confused mass of blue suit, white cap, tattered coat tails and a touseled head.

He stood up close by the door to try and discover what was the matter.

"It looks as if the conductor had gotten into a row with a drunken man," he told himself. "Wonder if he's going to put him off the train."

But as yet he was sure that no signal to stop had

been given to the engineer, for the cars were just now running at a high rate of speed. "Sam's left me in charge here," Rob went on to reflect. "I s'pose a rear brakeman isn't supposed to leave his post, except to go back and flag. Great George!"

Rob clutched the window jamb to save himself from being flung into the corner as the car gave a tremendous lurch. The exclamation was evolved by the sight that met his eyes as he brought himself to an upright position again and looked out through the glass in the door.

There was no longer a car in front of him. The edge of the platform was all smashed in, and he could just catch a glimpse of the rest of the train rounding a curve to the left.

As for their own coach, the one Rob had been left to "look out for," it was rushing wildly off on a siding and straight for that which made the boy's brain grow dizzy and sent the blood all out of his cheeks as he gazed at it like one petrified.

CHAPTER IV.

ROB DISTINGUISHES HIMSELF BY DOING NOTHING.

What Rob saw directly ahead of him was neither an open drawbridge nor another train coming from the opposite direction. At the first glance the track seemed to be perfectly clear, and it was only when his eyes fell to a level with the roadbed itself that he saw the terrible danger that menaced the runaway car.

Scarcely twenty yards in front of him was a trestle, a very short one, spanning a road, and on this two men were at work, one at either end, placing a rail in position. It was evident that they had no idea that anything was coming along that track. They had without doubt heard the train as it came up, and, knowing that it kept to the main line, paid no attention to it after it had passed.

Rob's position was indeed one of frightful responsibility. Everything had happened so suddenly that as yet no one in the car save himself realized that they had broken loose from the train. And now, what ought he to do, he asked himself?

His first impulse, of course, on seeing the two men at work on the track, was to rush out on the platform and shout to them to spring aside. But should they do this, he realized the next second, their incompleted work would throw the car from the trestle.

On the other hand, how could he stand there and see those two deliberately run over? If they would only look up, and thus take the fearful responsibility off his hands! But they were absorbed in their work, and seemed to hear and see nothing else.

Meantime, the car was rolling swiftly toward them. Rob thought of the brakes, but was convinced that they would not begin to take effect till after the trestle was passed.

He strained his eyes to try and make out whether the rail was yet in position, determined to shout the instant it was. But now some of the passengers behind him had observed that something was wrong, and two or three of the men left their seats and rushed for the door, which Rob had just cautiously opened.

He turned quickly when he heard them, and waved them back.

"Not a word for your lives!" he said, in as loud a tone as he dared. And they fell back, awed, mystified, and yet obedient in spite of themselves.

ROB DISTINGUISHES HIMSELF

All this had happened in the briefest possible space of time. Rob turned again to the danger point in front. The car was now almost on the bridge. The men would have no more time to do any effective work on the rail. Rob decided that they must risk it as it was.

Making a trumpet of his hand, he leaned forward over the guard rail and shouted, "Clear the track!"

Never will he forget the expression on the faces of those men as they looked up and saw the car. Each after an instant of dazed inaction, threw himself backward and rolled down the high embankment to the road beneath. Then the car ran out upon the trestle work and—stopped.

For Rob did not know that the snapping of the air pipes, which had of course taken place when the train parted, allowed the air to escape, and thus brought both sections to a standstill within a very short distance.

"What's the matter?"

"Where are we?"

"Where's the rest of the train?"

These were some of the ejaculations that resounded through the car when the passengers realized what had happened. One and all crowded their way to the doors, half striving to go in one direction and half in the other.

The obstinate woman who had sat with her parasol up was one of the first to suffer from this confusion. Her frail sunshade was crushed like an eggshell by a burly fellow in the seat behind, who rushed straight into it in his eagerness to escape.

It did not take the passengers many minutes to swarm out, and it was noticed that the greater number of them did not stop till they were several yards away from the track. In fact, the two ladies who had engaged in the dispute about the open window kept on until they had climbed a fence that bordered a meadow on top of the bank.

The two section-men speedily found their feet, and came hurrying up, wanting to know what it all meant. But nobody knew anything, apparently, except Rob, who was explaining things as fast as he could, although he felt pretty weak after the excitement through which he had just passed, and who would have much preferred to have sat down on the grass for a few minutes than to be obliged to answer ten or twelve questions at once.

"But what mystifies me," said one of the workmen, "is why that car didn't jump the rails. It looks to me as if they must have turned the switch."

But now up came the conductor, with Sam and several passengers from the main section of the train,

and an investigation was forthwith set on foot. This resulted in ascertaining that the man in the switch tower had shoved the wrong rod, thus sending the last car of No. 61 out on a siding.

Of course there was great excitement when it came out about the rail on the trestle, but nobody thought of ascribing any particular credit to Rob, as indeed all that he had done had been done in a negative way. That is, he had just refrained from doing the most natural thing in the world when he saw those men fixing the track. Sam was the first one who informed him that he had done anything remarkable.

It was after the car had been shunted back to the main track and another coach provided, in which all the passengers were gathered, and the journey to Packerstown resumed.

"I didn't think you'd have anything particular to do when I left you in charge of that car, Marston," Sam began, when they were once more seated side by side. "It was against rules for me to leave the car, and Syd will be reprimanded for it."

"Syd will?" exclaimed Rob.

"Yes; the conductor is responsible for the doings of the train hands when running."

"Then don't—don't you think the car would have broken loose if you had stayed on it?" Rob wanted to know.

"Certainly it would," replied the other, "and perhaps somebody's head would have been broken, too. I might not have done such a sensible thing as you did. By Jove, it was great! I'll tell Sumner about it. You couldn't have had a better thing happen to you."

Rob said nothing, but he only hoped that Sam's opinion of his action, or rather inaction, would be shared by the superintendent. The accident hadn't weakened his longing to get a position on the road in the least. On the other hand, he was now more anxious to "get into harness" than ever.

So, determined to be as well posted on the laws of the road as possible, he plied Sam with questions during the remainder of the trip, and when they reached Chelsea again at one o'clock, he felt equal to running a train by himself.

CHAPTER V.

THE YOUNG MAN IN THE BUGGY.

A week had gone by. On his return that day from his eventful run to Packerstown, Rob had been informed by Mr. Sumner that he might go to Philadelphia and be measured for his brakeman's suit. He would be assigned a "run," the division superintendent told him, just as soon as possible. He was given a pass over the road, and went on to Philadelphia that very afternoon to order his uniform, and returned to Westford that night in a high state of exultation. And every mail-time since he had been to the postoffice before the bag was opened, eager to receive his appointment to active service.

"Rob Marston's going to be a brakeman," was quickly noised abroad through the town, and everybody seemed to take the greatest possible interest in the fact. It was the first time that any of Westford's population had entered into railroad service, and Rob's friends were divided into two parties in their opinion of the matter.

One party overwhelmed him with congratulations, appearing to think that he had won some highly coveted office in a closely contested election, while the other declared that he was taking his life in his hand, and prophesied that he would be brought home on a stretcher inside of a week.

"When are you going to begin, Rob?" asked George Frame, as the two boys were taking their usual Sunday-afternoon stroll together.

"That's just what I don't know, George," was the reply. "Mr. Sumner said he couldn't give me a run just then, as there was no vacancy, but told me to be ready to respond to a call at any time."

"But I thought your suit wouldn't be ready under ten days."

"It won't; but that won't make any difference. The company furnishes the caps with the metal plates, and I can get one of those any time over at Philadelphia, and that's all I need to begin on."

"You have to pay for your uniform, don't you?" asked George.

"Yes; they take it out of your wages."

"And you get \$1.65 a day, you say, and the suit costs \$15.75. Let me see, that will leave you about \$34 for your first month's earnings. That's doing pretty well, I think, don't you? You can soon save

up enough on that to get married," George added, laughingly.

"But, my dear fellow, you fail to take into account the fact that my run may be between Philadelphia and New York, and out of my wages I will have to pay anywhere from five to seven dollars a week for room and board."

"Great Scott, I forgot all about that! It won't leave you very much margin for luxuries, will it?"

"Oh, I'll have to win those by working eight days a week now and then," rejoined Rob.

"Working eight days a week!" ejaculated George. "Why, how in the name of wonder can you do that?"

"I'll tell you. The P. C. road calls a day's work the run from New York to Philadelphia and back, or the reverse. Well, if a fellow has his time so divided that he can do two of these in twenty-four hours when there is call for an extra, why he gets \$1.65 for that added run. See?"

"Yes, and I also see that something's wrong with the driver of that horse coming down the road yonder," returned George, his eyes riveted on a buggy that was slowly approaching them.

What especially attracted his attention to the vehicle was the fact that it maintained a very erratic course, first running along close to one side of the

road, then going off at an angle to the other. It was as yet too far off to make out who the occupant was, but presently Rob, whose eyes were a trifle sharper than George's, announced that there was but one person in it, a man, and he seemed to be asleep, for he was all tumbled up in a heap at one side, his head sunk on his breast.

"Perhaps something's wrong. Hadn't we better hurry up and investigate?" suggested George. But Rob had already quickened his steps, and a moment or two later gave an exclamation of surprise.

"Hello, here's a coincidence, George," he cried. "That fellow's one of the brakemen on the P. C."

It was indeed the young fellow whom Rob had noticed a week before, standing on the rear platform of an express train as it passed through Chelsea. At first he did not recognize him, as he was dressed now in a dark gray suit, with a brown derby hat. Moreover, his eyes were closed, and as a consequence he had none of that brisk, wide-awake air that had attracted Rob to him when he saw him on duty that morning.

"Do you know him, Rob?" asked George.

They were now almost up with the horse, which they could see was allowed to wander where it would, the lines resting lightly on its back.

"No, but I would like to," answered Rob. "He looked to be a first-rate fellow, full of fun and life."

"It looks to me very much as if he was full of something else, just at present," returned George. "I really don't think it's safe to let him go on along the road in that condition."

And as he spoke young Frame caught the sorrel horse by the bridle and brought it to a halt.

Rob meantime sprang lightly on the step of the buggy and bent over the occupant.

He instantly drew back with an expression of disgust.

"You're right, George," he said. "I smell the whisky. Isn't it a shame?" and he looked again at the young man who of his own free will undoubtedly had sunk himself so low.

Evidently he had not been very long at this sort of thing, for his was a manly face. He appeared to be about twenty-four, had a small, neatly trimmed black mustache, and his nose was really aristocratic in its cutting.

As Rob looked down at him a great wave of compassion welled up in his breast. He longed to help him in some way. But how? And would the fellow thank him for interfering?

"Well, why don't you rouse him up, Rob?" George wanted to know after an instant's pause.

"I s'pose I ought to, but I don't know just how he'll take it."

"Oh, that'll be all right," put in George. "Don't you see he's stupidly, not fightingly, drunk? Perhaps if you rouse him up he'll come to all right and be able to take care of himself."

Thereupon, Rob reached forward and gently shook the stranger by the shoulder. He stirred uneasily, and slowly opened his eyes. He looked at Rob inquiringly for an instant and then closed them again. It was evident that he had not the slightest inkling of where he was.

"Give him another and a harder shake," suggested George.

This Rob proceeded to do, adding thereto his voice in a series of admonitions to "Come, rouse up here. Your horse may run off with you."

This time the fellow opened his eyes to their fullest extent and, gazing up at Rob, muttered sleepily, "Who are you?"

"Rob Marston; but that's of no consequence now. I'm only one of two fellows who were passing along the road and saw that you did not know where you were driving. We thought it better to stop you and wake you up. That's all."

But before Rob had concluded this speech the

other's eyes had closed again, and he had sunk back into his drunken slumber.

"Oh, come on, Rob," now called out George. "Don't waste any more time over him. Let's make a tie strap of the reins and fasten the horse to the tree here. Then he can sleep off his debauch at his leisure."

"I won't feel right to do that, George," objected Rob. "This fellow certainly needs somebody to look out for him, and as I'm a member now of the same craft to which he belongs, I think I ought to stay with him till he gets his senses back."

"Oh, well, suit yourself. I've got to be at home within half an hour," and without another word George let go the bridle and walked past the buggy in the direction of Westford.

CHAPTER VI.

WEBB HILLMAN.

Rob remained there, standing with one foot on the step and the other in the buggy, for a full minute, looking after the retreating form of his friend. It was evident that George was put out, and Rob hated disagreements of any kind. Still he felt sure that he was doing the right thing in sticking by the helpless fellow in the carriage. It might be that it was the first time he had ever been in such a condition, and Rob was a boy to put himself in another's place and try to imagine just how he would like to be treated himself.

He half fancied that George would think better of it and look around; but he didn't, and then, taking a long breath, Rob addressed himself anew to the peculiar duty that had come in his way.

"Perhaps he'll rouse better if I yell some railroad phrase in his ear," he reflected, and bending down, he called out with the full force of his lungs: "All right here!"

This, he had noticed, was the signal the brakeman gave to the conductor that his section of the train was ready to start.

The cry broke in strangely on the Sunday afternoon stillness, but it was extremely effective. The slumbering one straightened himself up with a start and threw one arm upward so suddenly that he barely escaped knocking off Rob's hat.

"Hello! What's this? Where am I?" he exclaimed, and then falling back again, he clapped one hand to his forehead and added: "How confoundedly my head aches!"

The next instant he added, looking searchingly at Rob: "Hullo; who are you, and what are you doing here?"

This was rather an embarrassing question under the circumstances. It can never be very pleasant for a man to be told that he has been intoxicated. Rob hesitated for an instant, and then as he saw the other feeling of his watch pocket suggestively, he hastened to say: "You were asleep in the wagon; the horse was taking his own head along the road, and I thought it was safer to wake you up."

As he spoke, he handed the reins over and prepared to get out.

"Hold on, young fellow; where are you going?"

the stranger wanted to know. "You're a—well, I owe you a good deal for doing what you've done. I guess you know well enough that I wasn't really asleep, but had made a confounded idiot of myself. I wish you didn't have to leave me just yet. I'm going to be pretty sick. Say, do you live far from here?"

"About three-quarters of a mile, over in Westford. Were you going there?"

"No; I'm bound for Red Ball," was the answer. "I've got an aunt who lives there. She likes to have me come to see her as often as I can. But I work on the railroad and can't get off only Sundays, and then there are no trains, so I come up to Chelsea late Saturday night and have to hire a wagon to bring me over here. I'm in pretty condition to call on an old lady who just dotes on me, ain't I?" and the fellow began fumbling through his pockets as if searching for a clove or something of the sort.

"You're all right now, aren't you?" said Rob, encouragingly.

But the other's answer was a toppling over to one side, and for a few minutes he was too sick to hold his head up. Then with all the color gone out of his cheeks, he sank back with closed eyes.

If Rob had felt like helping the fellow before, he

was doubly sympathetic now, when he had heard his self-condemnatory utterances.

"If you like, I will drive you on to Red Ball," he said. "It isn't over two miles, and won't be very much out of my way. It looks as if a shower was coming up."

The other was too weak to do more than nod his head and give Rob a grateful look. The latter needed nothing more, and catching up the lines, spoke to the horse, and the buggy continued on its way.

Meanwhile, the clouds that had been rolling up in the west obscured the sun, and there was every promise of a thunder-storm. The wind rose and rattled the fallen leaves along the roadside noisily, and the sorrel trotted faster of her own free will.

The increased stir in the air seemed to have a reviving effect on the sick man. He lifted his head presently, and Rob could hear him muttering to himself: "What a fool! What a fool I've been!"

Thinking to distract his thoughts, although our hero could not but feel at the same time that all this self-recrimination would be productive of good, Rob remarked:

"You brake on the P. C. road, don't you? I expect to get a passenger run there myself."

"That so?" exclaimed the other. "Queer you

should be the one to help me out of this scrape. It would play hob with me if I should ever get this way on duty."

"I hope," Bob ventured to remark, "that you don't 'get this way' very often."

The other turned his head to give the boy a steady look before he answered. Then, seeming satisfied with his scrutiny, he replied :

"This is the second time. I hope it will be the last, but I don't dare say it will be. I s'pose you wonder how I got this way today. I'll tell you. I got in with a lot of the fellows I used to know in Chelsea when I lived there. They took me off to an anniversary of a club of theirs last night, where they kept things up pretty late. Then, when it came time for me to start today, two or three of them came around 'to see me off,' and there were more drinks. And I can't stand a little bit and—and you know the rest."

"What a thousand pities!" was Rob's thought as he listened to this brief recital.

The more he knew of this stranger, the deeper grew his first impression that he was a young man of unusually refined sensibilities and strong character. And to think that the ruin of all was threatened by this insidious foe from within!

There was silence for a time while the sorrel mare trotted on.

"I'll have to put the horse up at the hotel," said the stranger, as they entered the village of Red Ball. "Aunt Priscilla has a little box of a house, but it isn't far away. And you must come on around with me and stay to tea. Then I'll drive you back this evening. Aunt is always delighted to see any friends of mine. Besides, it's going to storm and you mustn't be allowed to walk back after all you've done for me."

There was nothing for Rob to do but accept. Besides, he saw that his companion was still very weak when they got out at the sheds behind the little tavern.

So he gave him his arm, and together they walked through the quiet streets and halted presently before a little brown house almost hidden by trees. There was an old lady in a white cap seated at the window beside the door, and the smile that lit up her face when she caught sight of them reminded Rob of the flood of light that is suddenly poured out upon the earth when the sun emerges from behind a bank of clouds that has been obscuring it all the afternoon.

As they walked up the little box-bordered path, his companion paused and turned to say, "Oh, I must ask you for your name so that I can introduce you. Mine is Webb Hillman."

Rob gave his, and then the door was opened, and Webb was in his aunt's arms. She turned to Rob then

and welcomed him cordially and they all went into the house.

"I wonder if she noticed anything?" thought Rob, and then his attention was attracted by a large charcoal drawing of a remarkably handsome boy that was fastened against a closet door in the parlor and which was the most prominent thing in the room.

"Why, that must have been Hillman when he was younger," he told himself, little realizing under what circumstances he was to see a similar portrait again, nor how strangely his life was to be tangled with that of him whose acquaintance he had just formed so oddly.

CHAPTER VII.

AN APPOINTMENT AT LAST.

The storm broke soon after their arrival, and it rained heavily for two hours or more. This fact assured Rob that they would not worry over his absence at home, believing that the storm had sent him to the Frames' to tea.

"What *would* George say to see me here?" Rob asked himself, when seated at the cozy supper table.

Hillman seemed to have entirely recovered from the effects of the liquor, although he was very quiet. But his aunt did not seem to mind this much. All she appeared to require of him was to eat heartily, sit where she could see him, and smile now and then at her stories of his pranks and achievements when a boy.

"Yes, Mr. Marston," she said, "Webb took to railroads when he was no more than two years old. I sometimes think his father must have been a railroad man."

"Why, hello, Aunt Priscilla," broke in Webb, "I thought you told me father was a mill-owner till the

flood came and carried the whole thing off and him with it."

"So I did, so I did," exclaimed the old lady, in considerable confusion, and then Rob saw her deliberately knock her cup over with her hand.

This of course created a commotion, especially as the hot tea poured off the cloth upon the back of Miss Priscilla's pet cat, which set up a wail of anguish.

"There is some mystery about Hillman, I'm sure of it," was Rob's conclusion. "But our positions are reversed, I imagine: he doesn't know he isn't himself, while I do. Anyway, he's an awfully nice fellow, and I'm going to do all I can to save him *from* himself."

Webb had explained to his aunt that Rob had just been appointed to a position on the road, which sufficiently accounted for his presence.

"If the old lady knew how you found me," he informed Rob, while the dishes were being washed, "it would about break her heart."

"Then don't run such a risk again, will you?" Rob hastened to suggest.

"Can't promise; I'm a terribly weak fellow, Marston, and you chaps who are not tempted that way have no idea of the power of it. But I'll do this much for you. I'll say I'll try my best to run away from temptation when I see it coming. That won't be cowardly, do you think?"

"No, indeed," rejoined Rob. "It is the only manly thing to do. But I say, how old were you when that picture was taken?"

"About three, I guess. I don't remember it, at any rate. By the way, I wonder what run they'll give you?"

"What is yours?"

"Oh, a pretty good one—express both ways; I leave Philadelphia at 8:20 in the morning, and get back at 7:30 at night."

"Have you any idea what I'll get?"

"No; for you see you're going to be taken on in a new way. Most of us fellows are promoted to passengers from freight, but from what you tell me about Sumner sending you off with Sam Howell to get an idea of the business, I imagine you are going to be put on a passenger right away."

"But the other fellows won't like that, will they?" said Rob a little uneasily.

"Oh, they won't care when they know it's because you did something for the road. Besides, Sumner will probably give you the worst run, and put the next fellow to come right over you."

"The worst run? What do you mean by that?" and Rob's tones took on such an anxious quaver that Hillman smiled as he answered:

"Oh, it isn't anything so very terrible, only you have to get used to sleeping in the daytime and being up all night. The worst run is No. 14, which leaves Philadelphia at 12:05, midnight. Then you take No. 23 back from Jersey City the next morning at 6:35."

"Oh, that's all it is," said Rob, breathing a sigh of relief. "I thought it might be one that went with an old, worn-out engine, likely to blow up any minute, or something of that sort. And so you really think I will get that? But then where could I live? I couldn't sleep home, for I'd have to leave just as it was time to go to bed, and I wouldn't get to New York in time to put up there;" and Rob concluded by staring at his new friend with a comical look of perplexity.

"That's just what I told you, don't you see?" rejoined Hillman. "You'll have to turn day into night, and sleep from say eleven till six at night, in Philadelphia."

"But then I'll lose my dinner," objected Rob.

"No, you needn't. You can just take it some other time, either when you wake up or just before you go to sleep."

"If I get that run I can't live at home, in Westford, very well, can I?" went on Rob, reflectively.

"No; it would keep you on the rails nearly every

hour of the twenty-four if you did that. You'll have to find some place to board in Philadelphia, near the station. I can recommend you to a house kept by Mr. Gaddis."

"*Mr. Gaddis!*" echoed Rob. "I thought boarding houses were always run by a landlady."

"This one isn't. Mrs. G. is the cashier in an Eighth Street restaurant, and is away from six o'clock in the morning till eight at night. Her husband keeps the house and looks after the children."

"And how much will I have to pay them?" asked Rob.

"Twenty a month, mending included."

"Mending! Who does that?" Rob wanted to know.

"Mrs. G., during dull times at the restaurant. Here, I'll give you the address, and if you get that run you'd better arrange to stop there. Gaddis is used to having upside-down boarders."

"Upside-down boarders?"

"Yes, that's what Mr. G. calls the fellows who work at night and sleep daytime."

At this point Aunt Priscilla made her appearance, and the conversation became general for half an hour, when Hillman announced that it was time for him to start back.

"I shall be very glad to have you come again with

Webb some time," said the old lady, shaking hands with Rob, and then the two went off to the hotel for the horse.

The storm was now over and the moon out, so that the drive back to Westford was a pleasant one.

"You've been a good friend to me today, Marston," said Hillman in a solemn tone at parting.

"You know how you can make it up to me," replied Rob, significantly.

"I'll do my best," responded the other, as he spoke to the horse and drove on toward Chelsea.

"How queerly liquor affects that fellow," reflected Rob. "It seems to knock him clear under first off, and then, when he begins to throw off the effects, he isn't long in getting full control of himself. Ugh, what a monster to be in bondage to! It reminds me of a serpent."

A week went by, and still no word from Chelsea, but on the succeeding Monday the long-expected communication from Superintendent Sumner arrived. It was brief, and merely announced that Robert Marston had been awarded the rear brakeman's run out on No. 14 and back on No. 23, and requesting him to present himself at the road-master's office in Philadelphia at once, when further particulars would be furnished.

In spite of the time he had had in which to get ac-

customed to the new order of things, Rob was greatly excited now that the realization of his hopes was an accomplished fact. And Sadie and Dick were scarcely less so.

They both took it very hard that Rob would not be able to live at home, but soon saw that there was no help for it.

"Here, Rob," said Dick, when the little trunk was packed and carried out to the gate in readiness to be placed on the wagon, "here are thirty dollars. You will need this for expenses till your salary is paid at the end of the month."

"And then I will pay you back. No, Dick, it must be so. Good by. I don't know how to thank you and Sadie for all you've done for me."

The parting was hurried at the last—none of the three wished to prolong it—and Rob was soon seated on his trunk in Deacon Thurston's farm wagon, bound for his start in that career which was destined to be such an eventful one.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FOURTH FLOOR BACK.

If Rob could have remembered as far back as the day he first put on trousers, perhaps he might have recalled a moment when he felt prouder than he did this same morning of which we are writing, when, at the tailor's in Philadelphia, he tried on his brakeman's uniform.

On reporting at the superintendent's office in Chelsea, he had been given a pass and directed to take the first train for the western terminus of the road, secure his suit, and then report to the road-master at the station.

"It fits you like a glove," said the tailor, as he stood off and struck an attitude of admiration.

The clothes certainly did set well on Rob's trim figure, and our hero felt very "small boyish" indeed as he found his fingers instinctively seeking out the shining silver buttons, stamped with P. C. R., and of which it seemed only by stroking could he convince himself of their reality.

The uniform secured, Rob returned with it to the station, where he had a brief interview with the road-master, who seemed pleased when he found that the new recruit knew all about the time of the runs that had been allotted to him.

"You are to be flagman, that is, rear brakeman, you understand, so I shall expect you to report for duty tonight at 11:30." With this Mr. Carter dismissed him, and having placed the package containing his suit in the trainmen's room up stairs, Rob was free to go and arrange matters with Mr. Gaddis, the boarding-house keeper.

Being a country youth, he was obliged to inquire his way of a policeman, and, guided by the directions he received, he soon found himself standing in front of a three-story brick house, with the usual Quaker City appendages of alleyway and front marble steps.

Rob rang the bell, and after quite a long interval the door was opened by a thin-faced man, with a long nose and keen blue eyes that seemed to see right through a caller's coat into his pocket book and assure their possessor of how much money the visitor had with him.

"Mr. Gaddis?" said Rob questioningly.

"The same," was the cadaverous man's response, given in an appropriately hollow voice, as he tapped himself on the breast of an extremely shiny coat.

"I came to inquire about a room," went on Rob. "Mr. Hillman recommended me here."

"Hillman, Hillman?" said Mr. Gaddis, striking himself on the forehead once or twice. "Let me see, is he not a young man employed on the railroad?"

"Yes, and so am I," rejoined Rob.

"Night runs, or day?" was Mr. Gaddis' hasty inquiry, the reason for which was soon made apparent.

"Night."

"Good, then I can accommodate you, if you don't mind going in with another young man. You see we're full, and the only place I could put you is in a single room on the fourth floor. But if you would sleep all day while he's away at work, I guess that wouldn't make any difference; and of course I'd be willing to cut a little on the rates and let you have it for eighteen a month."

"Who is the young man?" Rob inquired, with a natural interest to know more about a fellow with whom he might be thrown into such queer companionship.

"It's Mr. Anthony Badgewood, a very worthy young man, quiet, and doesn't make any litter in the room. He goes out to business by eight in the morning, and doesn't get back till seven at night, and is out every evening. Would you like to see the room?"

"Yes, and—Mr. Badgewood, too—if I could," answered Rob. "Besides, he might like to see me."

"When did you want to come?" asked Mr. Gaddis, rubbing his bristly chin reflectively.

"Tonight. I go out to New York on the midnight train and I want to be settled before I start."

"Well, then, you can see him at seven o'clock dinner."

"But that will be pretty late for me to decide," objected Rob. "Couldn't I call on him sometime during the day at his place of business?"

"I couldn't tell you where that is," rejoined Mr. Gaddis, "for I don't know. As I told you, he's an awfully quiet chap, never says anything about himself, and pays his board regularly. I ask no questions."

Rob hesitated. He disliked to leave settling matters till the last moment, and yet he did not at all fancy the idea of buying a "pig in a poke" as it were. Perhaps, though, he could form some idea of the style of fellow this Badgewood was by the appearance of his room. So he decided to accompany Mr. Gaddis to the fourth floor and inspect it.

The apartment was small enough certainly, but had a good carpet on the floor, and the bed, though but a narrow iron cot, looked comfortable.

"How do you like the room? It is one your friend Hillman had when he was here."

"I think it will do," replied Rob, wheeling around

on his heel to take in one straight backed chair, a small rocker, a bureau with three drawers, an iron washstand, and a curtain concealing a row of hooks behind the head of the bed.

"Then I may expect you?" eagerly interposed Mr. Gaddis, adding: "Have you a trunk?"

"Yes, but I don't see where I can put it."

"Oh, you can keep it out in the hall here along with Mr. Badgewood's."

"One thing more," continued Rob, as they started on the return down stairs. "You say that you have dinner at seven. That will be the only meal I can be here to get."

"Certainly, I understand what you mean," rejoined Mr. Gaddis. "I will give you a lunch to take along. Your breakfast you will of course take in Jersey City, the same as my other boarders get their lunch down town. This matter is considered in the rate I make you. Will expect you tonight, or any time this afternoon. Indeed, I would be very happy to have you come in season for our lunch at one."

"I may be here then," returned Rob, and he hastened back to the station to get his trunk.

He found an expressman who agreed to take his trunk over to the Gaddises' and carry it up stairs for a quarter, and by the time this was accomplished it was one o'clock and lunch time.

Rob descended to the dining-room, where he was considerably surprised to find nobody at table but Mr. Gaddis.

"Yes, you see there is nobody at home to lunch except Saturday, when I have my boy Launcelot and my daughter Beulah with me."

The repast was a fairly good one, and as soon as it was over Rob returned up stairs and busied himself for an hour in studying out the stations on the P. C. R. from an employee's time card he had procured at the station. Then he took a stroll out to the Zoological Gardens, where he remained until it was time to start back for dinner and to make the acquaintance of Mr. Anthony Badgewood.

CHAPTER IX.

BEGINNING WORK.

As the Gaddis mansion was a small one, the table was not of the traditional length usually associated with boarding houses, and when Rob went down to dinner he found only Mr. Gaddis, with a very fat girl of ten on one side of him, and an extremely thin boy of eight on the other, and two ladies of uncertain age who were introduced as Mrs. Spoffer and her daughter. Which was the mother and which the daughter Rob could never find out.

There were still two places left vacant, one next to Rob for Mr. Badgewood, and the one just opposite. After the introduction, conversation flagged, except as it was broken at intervals by the squabbling of Miss Beulah and Master Launcelot, who never seemed to agree on any subject.

Presently the door opened and a young man entered. He was a bright-faced fellow, and Rob hoped he might turn out to be his roommate, but he walked around to a seat on the opposite side and was presented as Mr,

Brainerd. He was scarcely seated when a hesitating step was heard outside, and then there entered Mr. Anthony Badgewood.

He seemed scarcely twenty; his hair was so light as to be almost white; and such an expression of meekness Rob had never seen on mortal's face. He kept his eyes covered with his eyelids nearly all the time, only raising them for an instant when spoken to, and seemed plunged in the profoundest melancholy.

"Well, here's a cheerful prospect," thought Rob.

It did not take the company long to dispose of dinner, as but little time was wasted in talk. Rob said nothing to Badgewood; he did not like to allude to their forthcoming companionship, as he knew Mr. Gaddis could not yet have informed the other of the fact.

This was done immediately after dessert. Badgewood received the news with perfect composure, mumbled something about being glad to have company, and then made a bolt for the door as if eager to rid himself of it.

When Rob reached the fourth floor back he found his roommate plastering his hair down on his forehead, evidently making preparations to go out and spend the evening. This he did very shortly, with a brief good-night, and then Rob was left monarch of

all he surveyed. The partial unpacking of his trunk and the arrangement of his things took up a good deal of time, and almost before he realized the fact it was half-past ten.

"I must be around at the station early tonight," he told himself, consulting the silver watch that had been given him by his foster father on his sixteenth birthday.

With a strange thrill at his heart, he put out the gas and started off.

"Belford," was the name he kept repeating to himself as he walked along. It was that of the conductor with whom he was to run, and Rob was anxious to make his acquaintance as speedily as possible.

On arriving in the comfortable trainmen's room, he found several of the employees there, many of them smoking, some playing games, and a few stretched out on the tables in deep sleep. When he was there in the morning he had been assigned a closet in which to keep his uniform, and this he now unlocked and proceeded to don the spick and span new suit.

Nobody paid much attention to him at first, but presently two brakemen, who had been playing checkers at the table nearest him, finished their game, yawned, and in looking about for something new with which to occupy their minds, caught sight of Rob just as he was putting on his coat.

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"Hello, Dick," said one, "that's a freshy, isn't it?"

"Yes, he's going out on No. 14, an' Belford's as mad as hops about it. He's got a friend on freight and he thought Marshall ought to have had the place when Gordon was promoted."

"This chap looks to be pretty young, too," went on the first speaker.

Rob overheard and felt anything but comfortable at the prospect. So what Sam Howell had hinted at had actually occurred—he had stepped into a place somebody else wanted and was to be made to suffer for it accordingly. Still, he ought to expect some drawbacks, and he made up his mind to say as little as possible, and trust to those in authority to right anything that might be wrong.

It was by this time verging on toward half-past eleven.

"I must find Mr. Belford first thing," thought Rob.

So he went up to the two at the checker table, feeling as if the words "New suit, new suit!" were emblazoned all over him, and inquired, "Can you tell me where I can find Mr. Belford?"

"Oh, he hasn't come yet," replied the one who had given the information so disturbing to Rob's mind. "He'll be here presently. Going out with him, are you?"

"Yes, and I've never seen him, so I won't know him when he does come."

"I'll put you on to him. There he is now," and the speaker nodded his head toward a quick-stepping, heavily built man who had just entered the room.

"Thanks," said Rob, and started toward him, and then seeing that he was hurriedly changing his clothes, decided that he had better wait till this operation was completed.

So he sauntered off to one of the windows looking down into the big station, and watched the long lines of cars standing there.

It was very quiet in the building at this hour, and Rob wondered if there would be many passengers on his train, and then he turned back, ready to make the acquaintance of Conductor Belford.

The latter was just buttoning his vest when Rob, taking off his cap, walked up to him.

"Mr. Belford?" he said, inquiringly.

"Yes, that's my name," was the gruff reply. "Well, what do you want?"

Tom Belford was a man of about forty, hard-featured and with a close-cropped head of hair that reminded one disagreeably of a convict. He had greenish sort of eyes that seemed to bore into one like gimlets when they were fixed on a luckless victim, and they were now turned full on Rob.

"I want to report that I am here, ready to start,"

faltered the boy. "I'm Rob Marston, and I'm going to run with you."

"Oh, you are, are you?" was the other's retort. "Well, I'm not glad to see you. I hate to work in new men. They never have any sense. You say you're all ready, do you?" he added, with a searching look at the new recruit.

"Yes, sir," replied Rob, cudgeling his brains to recall all that Howell and Hillman had told him.

"Then go down stairs, stand by your car, and be ready to call out when the doors are opened."

Rob lost no time in following these instructions, thankful that the conductor usually remained in the baggage car while his own post was at the end of the train.

He was obliged to inquire on which track he would find "the owl," which had just been backed in, and having discovered it, took up his position by the steps of the rear platform.

Within five minutes Belford came up, gave one glance at him, and then burst out angrily: "Of all the lunkheads! I thought you said you were ready. If this is a sample of what you know, there'll be a wreck on the line tonight, or my name's not Tom."

CHAPTER X.

TRIALS OF A FIRST RUN.

What could Rob have done that was so much amiss? The poor fellow racked his brain in vain to recall a slighted duty, but before any came to mind, Belford burst forth in a fresh paroxysm:

"And not a light in your car, either! What do you think the company employs you for, anyway? To stand around and strike attitudes? Be off with you this instant to the lamp-room."

The lights, of course; how stupid he was! But where was the lamp-room? Rob knew he could get no information on the subject from Belford. The only thing for him to do was to blunder about, inquiring of whoever he could find.

But it was already twenty minutes to leaving time, and as Rob recalled the tendency that matches have to flicker and go out just when one is in the greatest hurry, he realized that he was beginning his new career in anything but an auspicious fashion.

"Belford ought to have reminded me of all this,"

he told himself. "I believe he didn't do it on purpose."

After twice getting into the wrong place he found the lamp-room at last, and on making known his wants, was given the two red lights for the rear of the train, together with a red-and-white one for himself. Catching all these in a promiscuous heap, he was about to rush off when he recollected that he had not a single match about him. So he was forced to deposit his load, ask for a supply, pocket it, and then take up his burden again.

When he got back to the train it lacked but five minutes of the time when the gates were opened to let the people aboard, and Belford was stamping up and down the platform, fuming with impatience.

"Drop those on the rear platform," he roared, "and go to lighting your car first."

So Rob sprang aboard the dark coach, struck one of his matches and then held it over his head while he searched for one of the lamps.

"Great George, it's gas," he exclaimed the next minute, "and I don't see any place to turn it on from."

He searched wildly around for an instant and then realized that there was nothing for it but to rush outside and ask Belford to help him out. Of course there was a scene over this, and a series of maledictions

while the conductor was showing him how to turn on the gasoline at one end of the car and then light the five burners with a taper.

By the time one lamp was lighted, the passengers began to arrive and Belford went out on the platform, leaving Rob to do the rest himself. He knew that he ought to be outside helping the ladies aboard, but the faster he tried to work the clumsier did his fingers appear to grow, and he capped the climax by dropping his taper on the shoulder of an old gentleman.

Of course this occasioned a delay, and meantime the gas was escaping, causing loud-voiced objections from the incoming passengers. And just as Rob lighted the last burner the train began to move out of the station, and he remembered with a thrill that the rear lights were not yet in position.

The perspiration came out on his forehead in beads as he realized that any accident resulting from this fact could be justly laid to his door, and he made a bolt for the rear end.

He had thoughtlessly blown out his taper, so now he was obliged to strike a match. The first one went out, owing to the breeze from an open window, and he had just got the second ignited when the train came to a sudden halt.

There was now greater necessity that the lamps

should be in position than ever, but the very knowledge of this fact caused poor Rob to give such a start that the match dropped from his hand, and the tiny flame was extinguished on the floor.

Frantically taking another he tried to forget for that instant that he was terribly anxious to retain the bit of wood alight, and struck it on the floor, shielding it from the draft behind the back of a seat. This time he succeeded in transferring the flame to the two red lamps and hurrying outside, he placed them in position.

"Now, I ought to have my red lamp ready and go back along the track," he told himself, and was just proceeding to light it when he heard the air signal to go ahead.

"I wonder who gave that," he exclaimed, starting up.

And then he saw Belford coming down the aisle toward him, looking more enraged than ever.

Taking Rob by the arm he led him out on the rear platform out of earshot of the passengers and gave him another "going over" for neglecting to call out the stop, assist the passengers aboard and give the starting signal.

"But I didn't think we'd stop so soon," faltered Rob. "I made sure something was the matter, and was hurrying all I could to get the lamps lighted."

"Well, sir, you are absolutely the worst I ever en-

countered," was the conductor's farewell comment as he betook himself forward again.

Rob remained standing there on the rear platform, feeling as if he had been drawn through a knothole. Was he indeed so hopelessly stupid? And he had looked forward with such high anticipation to this moment, when, clothed in his natty uniform, he should stand in the position he was at present occupying, and glory in his responsibilities.

"It can't be all my fault, though," he reflected. "Somebody ought to tell me the first time. Perhaps, though, they expect that the new fellows will remember things better if they learn them with hard knocks like this."

This thought consoled him in a measure for his blunders, and stepping inside he took out his time table and studied up on his stations. But he was scarcely seated when he felt the train slow up and knew that he was expected to call out in the two cars.

Now, this act of calling out the name of a railroad stop may seem a very simple thing to do, but just at that moment Rob felt as if his mouth had suddenly become parched.

Nearly every person in the car had curled himself up in his seat in comfortable fashion for a nap, and he could just picture the disgusted sighs that would arise

when he shattered the silence with his announcement. But it was something that must be done, and pulling himself together, Rob flung open the door and called out, "Frankford, Frankford!" as loudly and distinctly as he could.

He did not wait to see the effect, but hurried into the other car to repeat the job and then stationed himself on the steps, ready to spring off as soon as the train came to a standstill.

"Hello, it's raining," he exclaimed, as he felt a drop upon his hand.

There were no passengers to alight, and none that he could see to get aboard, so he called out "All right here!" and then listened for the answering cry from Belford. It came, but gruffly enough, and springing back upon the car, Rob pulled the signal and the train moved on.

"This is something like," murmured Rob, as he walked to the rear of the car and took a seat where he could survey his passengers.

Perhaps it was childish, but he could not resist the temptation to take off his cap and rub his coat sleeve once or twice over the glistening plate bearing the word "Brakeman." He was immersed in this occupation when he felt himself touched on the arm, and lifting his head with a guilty start, he found a middle-aged lady standing beside him.

"What time do we get to New York?" she asked.

"At three o'clock," replied Rob, promptly, glad that he could remember this fact without being obliged to consult the time table.

"Dear me, that is dreadful late for a poor lone woman to be out," went on the lady. "I wonder—"

But at this point the cars slowed up again for the next stop and Rob was obliged to leave her for a moment. She was waiting for him, however, when he got back.

CHAPTER XI.

DOWN BRAKES.

"I wonder what that old lady wants now?" thought Rob, when he re-entered the car and found his late companion sitting on the outer edge of her seat, leaning out over the aisle with beckoning finger stretched toward him.

"It's dreadful unfortunate I had to take this train," she began when Rob reached her and halted. "But, you see, it was just this way: John's wife wasn't sure but the baby was goin' to have colic. I was to come by the eight-o'clock train, but 'Mandy was nervous about bein' left alone with a case of colic, this bein' her first, so I stayed. I must be in York the fust thing in the mornin' to ketch a train up to Connecticut. I'm goin' ter a funeral there, you know."

"Yes," said Rob, as the old lady paused for breath, as to make herself heard above the rumble of the train required an effort.

"So 'Siah—he's 'Mandy's husband," she went on after an instant, "he says for me to go ter a hotel that's

close by the station where I have to go out in the mornin', and I was thinkin' so much of that part that I forgot all about the end of this. And I've heard that New York's a mighty wicked city."

"Perhaps you could find a carriage waiting at the ferry," suggested Rob.

"Sakes alive, I couldn't afford that!" exclaimed the old lady. "I was wonderin', though, if you didn't live in New York somewheres near where I'm goin'."

"No, I live in Philadelphia," replied Rob, adding, in the kindness of his heart, "but I'll have time to take you up town if you like before I go back."

"Oh, will you?" was the joyful exclamation, but further expressions of gratitude were cut short by the stoppage of the train at the next station.

It was now raining hard, and even during the few moments that Rob was obliged to be out, he got pretty wet. And as he shook the dampness from his coat collar he suddenly remembered that he had no umbrella.

"I'm afraid I'm in for it," he thought. "Still, it would be a shame to let her go all that distance alone at that hour."

When he entered the car again he found the old lady settled back in the corner of her seat, comfortably composed for sleep.

"Her mind's relieved now, I suppose," reflected

Rob, and then he became conscious of the awful fact that he was terribly sleepy himself.

"I ought to have prepared myself for this," he murmured, "by taking a nap this afternoon."

He did not dare sit down, as his eyes were so heavy that he feared as soon as he placed himself in an easy position he would drop off without warning. So he took up his position on the rear platform, clinging to the handrail to save himself from being swept off as the car swerved from side to side and oscillated on the curves.

The rain was now coming down in torrents, and it was accompanied by such a high wind that Rob presently found that he was getting nearly as wet as though he was out in it. There was, therefore, nothing to be done but to return inside.

"I'll just make up my mind that I *won't* go to sleep," he resolved. "I might as well do it first at last."

But there was very little to keep him awake except this indomitable resolve. There were some fifteen persons in the car, and, to all appearances, every one of these was wrapped in slumber.

Rob tried at first to entertain himself by surmising as to what brought out all these passengers at this hour of the night. He already knew about the old lady, who was, in fact, the only woman in the car.

Were the rest theatrical people, commercial travelers, detectives, or what, he asked himself.

But he soon found that he did not take a vital interest in this matter. What concern was it of his who these people were? He would probably never see any of them again, so—what—was—the—good—

For an instant Rob lost all train of thought, and then he became conscious of something strange. His surroundings seemed to be different in some way. He felt as if he had lost something to which he had become accustomed. And still he could not tell what it was until, like a flash, it came over him that it was the jar of the train. The cars had stopped and the cessation of the rumble had waked him up.

He was on his feet with a rush, and made a dash for the door. Had the train halted at a station or was it a stop that required him to go back with his lamp? This was the all important question that must be answered with all the speed possible.

Rob breathed a sigh of relief as he reached the outer air and leaned forward just in time to hear Belford sing out, "All right here."

He reached up and pulled the signal cord, shivering as he realized the narrow escape he had had. Suppose he had been a second later and the conductor had found no one to answer him? The mere neglect to light up a

car was a trivial matter compared to that of sleeping on the post of duty.

"I don't think anybody saw me," was his one grateful thought as he gazed around at the huddled up forms of the passengers.

But how was he to assure himself that the thing would not occur again? It was still raining heavily, so that the back platform continued to be unavailable. He walked to the rear of the car and stood up with his face pressed against the glass, trying to compare himself to a soldier and so summon military honor to his aid, when the train jarred heavily and then came to a sudden stop.

"There's no station here," muttered Rob, after hurrying out to look. "Something must be in the way, and I've got to go back with the light."

There was no longer any danger that he would not be kept awake. He had just decided that it was too wet to remain on the rear platform; now he must go forth into the very teeth of the storm.

Picking up his light he started bravely out, keeping his ears open for the succession of short whistles calling him back. He heard nothing, however, but the driving of the rain as it fell harshly on the ballast of the tracks, and the moaning of the autumn wind through the trees with which the road was lined at this point.

"I wonder if I'm far enough back now?" he asked

himself after some three minutes of rapid traveling over the ties.

He turned to look at the lights of the train and then decided that he had better keep on a little further. He was by this time drenched through and through, and his teeth were beginning to chatter with the cold.

"I ought to have a set of oilskins," was his thought, and at that instant came the toots of the eagerly awaited whistle.

Rob wheeled about and set out on the return trip at double quick.

"I'll show the engineer how fast I can do it," he thought, and so, when he reached the rear of his car, he put out his hand to press the air signal from underneath, as he had seen Sam Howell do once.

"I'll then have lots of time to run around to the steps and climb aboard while they are getting under way," he reasoned.

He sounded the signal in this manner, but as he started to get around to the side, he stumbled against a projecting stone among the ballast and fell prostrate.

In falling he struck his knee in particularly painful fashion, and for a moment could not move. But in that moment the train *did* move, and when Rob finally managed to stagger to his feet, it was already some distance away.

With a determination born of desperation the young

brakeman started after it, although every step caused him intense pain. But he soon found that he could never hope to catch the fast receding cars, and an instant later was fain to stop and seat himself on the track to rest his bruised limb and consider the situation.

It was certainly not an alluring one; left by his train in the midst of a furious storm, and, for all he knew, in the very heart of the backwoods. Surely this was a sorry commencement of the career to which he had looked forward so eagerly.

CHAPTER XII.

AN ADVENTURE OFF THE CARS.

For the first few moments after realizing that he had been left behind, poor Rob felt so chagrined and exasperated that he entirely forgot he was wet and uncomfortable; he thought only of his own stupidity in touching off the whistle before he was actually on board his car.

"You'd think I'd had enough humiliating experiences for one night," he muttered, "to keep me from trying to cut too big a figure. I don't suppose there's any show of their coming back for me! And there's that old lady who expects me to take her up town!"

But scarcely had this reflection crossed his mind, when a sharp whistle, close at hand, caused him to start upon his feet in short order. The glare of a locomotive headlight, coming from the direction of New York, was only a few yards away, and an instant later the train that bore it came to a halt.

"Great George!" ejaculated Rob. "I forgot all

about my red lamp. The engineer must have seen it and taken it for a danger signal."

He had now regained free use of his limbs, and hurried to the baggage car to explain matters.

The conductor didn't give him time to tell just how he came to be where he was, only said: "So they didn't wait for you on No. 14. All right, jump aboard. We'll take you as far as Chelsea; there you can catch No. 22. That will get you to Elizabeth before 14 passes, and so you can wait for it there."

This was a highly satisfactory arrangement to Rob, who lost no time in establishing himself on a trunk in the corner of the baggage car. Here he took off his coat and hung it over another trunk to dry, but was compelled to put it on very soon as the train drew up at Chelsea.

No. 22 was already there, and he was obliged to make a dash for the rear car to catch it.

"Why, hello, where did you come from?"

This was the exclamation that greeted him as he entered the door, and, looking up, he found Sam Howell standing before him.

Rob was so glad to see a familiar face that he greeted the brakeman as though he had been an old friend.

"I came from 14," he said in response to his question. And then he went on to tell of his series of adventures.

"Pretty exciting for a first trip, I must say," was Sam's comment.

"But who's taking my place?" Rob wanted to know, with considerable anxiety in his tones. "If that Mr. Belford has to do it, he'll be down on me worse than ever."

"Why, the other brakeman will be sent back, of course. Let me see, who is it? Oh, yes; Archie Hyde."

"The other brakeman!" exclaimed Rob. "I didn't know there was one. I didn't see him."

"That's queer. Still, he usually rides well forward, but it's funny he didn't come back to get acquainted with you and find out what sort of a chap you are. He looks something like you, come to think, only he's a little fuller round the waist and in the mustache."

"Perhaps Belford told him to keep away from me," suggested Rob, a sudden thought striking him. "I believe that man was anxious to have me make all the blunders possible."

"It may be," was Sam's comment. "But get acquainted with Hyde. You'll find him a nice fellow. Mention me."

All Rob's sleepiness had departed, and in converse with Sam Howell the time slipped away till the latter called out "Elizabeth!"

"This is the advantage of running on a four-track line," said the latter, as they shook hands. "No. 14 will be along pretty soon."

It was now quarter past three in the morning, and everything about was as quiet as a country churchyard. Rob's clothes had by this time dried out pretty well, but the night wind chilled him, and he was glad indeed when the headlight of his engine flashed into view.

"I wonder what Belford will say to me?" was his thought, as the train drew up at the platform.

But the last car halted immediately in front of him, and "That must be Archie Hyde!" he thought, as a light-haired brakeman sprang out with a cry, "All aboard for New York."

Rob entered his own car, where Hyde soon followed him, and looked rather mystified when he caught sight of his uniformed passenger.

"I'm Marston," Rob began at once, stepping up to him. "I got left back there just this side of Chelsea, and came on with Sam Howell. You're Hyde, aren't you?"

"Yes; you've had a tough first night of it, haven't you?"

"I should say I had, and I'm not through yet," rejoined Rob, as his eye fell on the old lady with whom he had engaged to go up town.

She was awake now, and beckoning to him with considerable energy.

"Oh, I understand matters now," exclaimed Hyde, as Rob left him in answer to the signals.

"Aren't we almost in New York?" asked the old lady, when Rob came up.

"In about half an hour," he answered.

"All right; you won't forget," she replied, looking at him sharply.

"Oh, no, ma'am," and then Rob hurried back to Hyde to obtain an explanation of what the latter meant by his "Oh, I understand now."

"First tell me if that old lady is any relation of yours," Archie wanted to know.

"No, indeed. She just hinted for me to take her up town when we got to New York."

"That was what she was driving at, then, when she called me to her after Belford sent me back here, and asked me if I was sure I knew the way to Forty-second street. I thought she must be a little touched here," and Hyde laughed as he placed his finger on his forehead under the visor of his cap for an instant.

The conductor now made his appearance, and simply scowled at Rob as he told Hyde to go back to his former position.

"I suppose Belford will make a startling report of

my incompetency to headquarters," thought Rob, as he dropped into a seat. "Still, I ought to have allowances made for my inexperience."

Jersey City was soon reached, and the old lady who wanted to go up town stuck like a leech to our hero till all the passengers were discharged.

"You ought to get a dollar for this job," Hyde whispered to him as he passed him on the platform.

But Rob shook his head vigorously. He had had no thought of money when he agreed to oblige the old lady. Besides, he recollected her expression when he suggested taking a carriage, and felt assured that in his case virtue would be in truth its own reward.

He carried the large satchel with which the old lady was burdened, while she held the umbrella over him. But by the time they reached Forty-second street it had stopped raining, for which Rob was deeply thankful.

It was but a short walk after leaving the elevated to the hotel, although Rob, being unfamiliar with city streets, was obliged to inquire the way of a policeman.

The night-clerk was dozing in his chair when they entered the corridor, and the elevator man was lying on a bundle of rugs, apparently asleep, near by.

The old lady registered as Mrs. Stephen Opdyke, first asking Rob to wait and see if she could be accom-

modated with a room. While she was arranging with the clerk about this, a gentleman ascended the stairs, hurriedly went in behind the desk, and made some request.

"Certainly, sir," said the clerk, and, turning to the large safe behind him, he opened it, took out a small box and handed it to the newcomer, who placed it on the desk and began to remove the paper in which it was wrapped.

The clerk then turned to Mrs. Opdyke, asked her pardon for his delay, and then assigned her a room on the second floor.

"I am very much obliged to you, young man," said the old lady, turning to Rob. "You may go and—"

But at this instant a fire engine dashed up in front of the hotel and came to a halt.

Instinctively everybody rushed to the door to see if the house was afire, Rob among the others. But the scene of the conflagration was in the next block, and the alarm proved to be a false one after all, and Rob continued on his way to Sixth Avenue.

But he had not gone half a block when he heard the sound of hurrying footsteps behind him, and, turning to see what it meant, was almost run down by a policeman, who, panting for breath, grasped him by the shoulder with the ominous words: "Young man, I want you!"

CHAPTER XIII.

A BAD SCRAPE.

"Why, what's the matter? Who wants me, and what for?"

Rob put these questions to the officer with no suspicion of the real answer to them. If he had formed any theory at all as to the cause of his being thus hailed it was that Mrs. Opdyke had regretted not having given him anything for his trouble and had sent the first person she chanced to see to recall him.

But, instead of replying, the policeman, still holding Rob tightly with one hand, began to thump him across the back and under the ribs.

"Come now," he suddenly burst out, "what did you do with that box?"

By this time the two were surrounded by a crowd of as large dimensions as could be expected to assemble at that hour of the morning—a night watchman, the driver of a market wagon, with a sprinkling of street urchins who had been sleeping in nooks and corners known only to themselves and who now stood

nudging one another and guying at the captive with ill-concealed delight.

"Catch on to ther shiny buttons, cully," Rob heard one of them say. "An' de white cap! Ain't he a raz-zle dazzle?"

"The box?" the young brakeman exclaimed in response to the officer's emphatically repeated questions. "What box? You've got hold of the wrong fellow."

"No, I haven't. Couldn't miss this rig. I wonder you're so reckless as to steal when you've got it on," and hugging Rob up close to him the policeman began to go through his pockets.

At this moment the gentleman whom Rob remembered seeing walk behind the desk at the hotel came rushing up, bareheaded, and laboring under the deepest excitement.

"Have you got him? Have you got the box?" he cried, and dashing in between the officer and Rob he seized the latter by the shoulders and started to shake him.

"Here, hands off! I'll tend to the prisoner," interrupted the guardian of the peace, putting his heavy shoulder against that of the excited gentleman and shoving him out of the way.

"But my box, my money!" cried the latter in imploring tones. "There's three thousand dollars in that box. If I don't get it I'm ruined."

Everything was now clear to Rob. This gentleman was a guest of the hotel, had placed his box of valuables from the office safe on the desk, and in the excitement occasioned by the dashing up of the fire engines had rushed with the others to the door and left it unguarded for the moment. He (Rob) was the only stranger present, and, naturally enough, suspicion at once pointed to him.

"I must keep cool," he told himself, as the whole terrible situation unrolled itself swiftly before his mental vision. "The case looks bad, but still the box wasn't found on me. That's one thing that ought to go a great way toward clearing me."

Alas, he soon found that this circumstance was not worth a straw's weight. As soon as the box-owner had been calmed down the officer led the way back to the hotel, where the examination could be conducted in more orderly fashion.

"He hasn't got the box with him," he told the complainant. "Without doubt he has concealed it somewhere. "Very likely it is in some one of these areas we are passing, where he flung it when he found himself pursued."

"But he probably had a confederate," interrupted the unfortunate gentleman, "and by this time he may be out of the state with his booty."

"Nonsense," returned the policeman. "Do you suppose he arranged that false alarm of fire, to say nothing of knowing that you would come down stairs at this unearthly hour of the night to put a diamond ring in the box?"

"Then don't you think I'll get my money back?" and the man clutched the officer's arm with a tenacious grip. "Why don't you begin looking in all the area-ways we pass? Or no, there's a better way than that. Here, you young thief!" and he turned suddenly on Rob again, "tell us where you slung that box. If you do, I'll let you off a little easier."

Our hero felt the strongest inclination he had ever possessed to strike a human being, but he restrained himself and said with all the earnestness he could command: "I did not take the box, so can't tell you where I put it. As the officer says, it would be very foolish in me to commit a theft in these clothes."

"Where is the box, then? It couldn't have gone without hands. No one else *would* have taken it, so you *must* have!"

"Why wouldn't any one else have taken it?" Rob wanted to know, but just at this moment they arrived at the hotel, where a strange spectacle was presented in the main corridor.

Two or three open mouthed chambermaids were

clustered on the grand stairway, the cook in his white cap and big apron was leaning over the counter talking earnestly with the clerk, while a middle-aged gentleman with gray whiskers was darting wildly up and down in his shirt sleeves, questioning first one and then another, and manifesting symptoms so similar to those of the man who owned the box, that Rob concluded at once that he must be the proprietor of the hotel.

He had just time to take in this much of the scene when his vision was obstructed for a moment by the interposition of a heavy waterproof cloak. This cloak belonged to Mrs. Oydyke, who had flung her arms around Rob with the cry: "My poor boy, to think I should have brought you to this!"

"Surely, you don't believe I took the box, do you?" cried Rob, working himself free.

"No, no, I know you didn't," she fairly sobbed. "That's what I've been telling them all the time, but nobody will believe me."

Before she could say any more the proprietor came up, and wrath and courtesy for the other sex each struggling for the mastery, began: "Now, madam, if you will allow us, we will conduct the examination of this misguided young man. Kindly step with me into my private office. Zounds, that such a thing should happen in my house!"

The crowd from the streets was barred out by the night watchman and the officer. Rob, the owner of the box, the night clerk, the landlord, and Mrs. Opdyke all went into a small room behind the desk.

"Now, then, Mrs. Opdyke," began the landlord after he had ascertained from the policeman that the box had not been found, "what can you tell us of the young man, who, you say, brought you to the hotel this evening? How long have you known him?"

This was an unfortunate question.

"Well, let me see," answered Mrs. Opdyke, beginning to reckon on her fingers. "We left Philadelphia at twelve o'clock, and it is now about four. I must have known him three hours and a half."

"And on such a short acquaintance, madam, you base your belief in his honesty?"

The landlord's voice was bristling with sarcasm, and he tossed his head with a superior air, or one that might have had that appearance, had not the fact of his being in his shirt sleeves rather marred the effect.

"Well, sir," snapped the lady, "half of that time was long enough for me to feel that he was honest enough for me to trust him to bring me up here. You haven't found the box on him. Why don't you let him go and look nearer home for the thief? He wasn't the only one standin' about when them fire engines came

up. "There was you," turning suddenly to point a finger straight at the night clerk, "and—and—where's that other fellow?"

"Come to order, madam," broke in the proprietor. "You are wandering from the subject. We want to know from you why you think the prisoner would not steal a valuable package if he saw his way clear to doing it."

"And I want to know where that other man is who first up and declared that this poor young brakeman must have done the stealing."

Rob's heart began to beat wildly. Whom did the old lady mean? Was it possible that he was to get off so soon and escape the shame of being dragged to jail?

The proprietor and the night-clerk held a whispered consultation and then the latter went hastily out.

CHAPTER XIV.

MRS. OPDYKE'S CLEVER DETECTIVE WORK.

"Don't you go for to worry yourself, young man," said Mrs. Opdyke, turning to Rob. "I'll see you through. I always says that where there's smoke there must be fire, and then again I've lived a good many years, an' I've allus noticed that people are mighty quick to blame other folks for things they know they'd do themselves if they had the chance; and this man had the chance, every bit as good a one as you. Ha! here he comes now. Can't you see guilt written on his face? I can."

The door opened, and the proprietor and the night clerk entered, followed by the man whom Rob had observed when he first entered the hotel, asleep on a rug in front of the elevator shaft.

"Hendricks here says he knows nothing of the affair more than the rest of us," began the landlord. "Tell your story, Hendricks."

"Yes, sorr," began the man, after a slight pause, which a clever detective would have known was neces-

sary to enable him to moisten his lips before he was able to frame the words. "You see, sorr, I was lyin' off on my rug there kapin' my ears open fur enny suspicious noises about the house. I see thi's young man an' the leddy coome in, and then Mr. Babcock coome down to get his box out of the safe. I was joost about to get up, ready to take the leddy up stairs whin the fire ingine coome swapin' up to de front of the house, and wid the rist I made a bolt fer the dures ter see what was the matter."

"And where was the prisoner, Michael, when you started?" asked the landlord.

"Standin' right next the desk, sorr," answered the man significantly, "and thin while I stood there watchin' the engines, I seen his white cap fly by me like that," and the watchman puckered his lips to make the sound "whist."

"Now, sir," interposed Mrs. Opdyke quickly, "may I ask the man a question?"

"Certainly, madam," responded the proprietor, interrupting himself for a moment in the whispered colloquy he was holding with Mr. Babcock.

Mrs. Opdyke was seated on the extreme farther side of the room next to Rob. Now she rose, and with her eyes fixed steadily on Michael, walked slowly and deliberately across the floor till she reached a position di-

rectly in front of him. The man shifted uneasily from one foot to the other, and tried to back farther away, but finding the wall close behind him, sought to avoid the persistent gaze fixed upon him by casting his own eyes up toward the ceiling with an awkwardly assumed air of injured innocence.

"Now, sir," began Mrs. Opdyke, raising her forefinger and flashing it up and down directly in front of the watchman's face, "how comes it you took the trouble to look at the desk after you heard the ingines? You'd have to turn your head the other way to do it. There, see, gentlemen, he doesn't dare look at me. And I'll venture to say his hands are trembling like aspen leaves."

With a sudden movement the astute lady stooped down and grasped one of the man's wrists. He gave a sort of inarticulate cry, tried to draw it away, and then sank down in a heap on the floor.

All was confusion in an instant. Everybody crowded around, and for a moment there was a strange silence.

Rob remained on the outskirts of the circle, a new, glad light in his eyes. Then presently the officer dropped his hand and came close to say, "You may go; the night watchman has confessed."

Our hero waited for no more. Eager only to be out

in the free, open air, he left the room, running against Mr. Babcock in the doorway.

"The shaft! the shaft!" the latter was crying wildly. "He says the elevator was six inches above the floor and he flung the box down there," and the last Rob saw of him he was trying to force his body through that six inches of space.

Long bands of gold-tipped clouds were stretched across the eastern sky as Rob came out on Broadway. Day had almost dawned.

"I haven't much time to lose," he reflected with a start, as he drew out his watch; "my train leaves at 6:20 from this side."

How he longed to be back on it! The events of the past hour seemed to him like some horrible nightmare, filling up the time between the end of one run and the beginning of another. He felt that he would be glad to see even Belford's face.

The air was fresh and invigorating after the storm, and Rob was soon sensible that it was inspiring him with an appetite. But he would have no time for breakfast, so, stopping at a bakeshop which was just opening for the day's business, he bought a couple of rolls and a doughnut, and ate them during his ride down town on the elevated.

"I wonder if every trip I make is to be as eventful

as this one?" he asked himself. Then he thought of the dollar Archie Hyde had said he would get.

"But if the old lady didn't give me that, she certainly did a lot more for me." Then he laughed, as the next thought that suggested itself to him was: "To be sure, if it hadn't been for her I wouldn't have gotten into the scrape."

He arrived down town barely in time to catch the 6:10 boat. His uniform passed him through the gates, and he was soon standing beside his train in Jersey City, calling out the stations.

This home-run was as good as an express, but few stops being made; this fact constituting, as Rob had already learned, the brakeman's paradise.

It was wonderful what a degree of confidence his one trip had given our hero. The possession of it was apparent in the unrestrained freedom of his tones as he sang out: "Philadelphia and Chelsea on the left! This way for Philadelphia!"

He had found time to run up into the trainmen's room and brush the mud from his trousers, and he certainly presented a very neat appearance as he stood there with shoulders squared and head thrown back, ready to assist his passengers aboard. He found that Archie Hyde remained in Jersey City all day, not going back till the "owl," bound westward, left that

night. Thus Rob would be the only brakeman on the train that morning.

This trip back to Philadelphia was a thoroughly enjoyable one to him. The train made but eight stops, and met with no delays. Rob spent the time sitting on the handrail on the rear platform, his knee braced against the brake, taking in the scenery, and trying to realize that he was actually a uniformed employee of the P. C. R.

Two or three times the recollection of his experience at the hotel would obtrude itself, but he forcibly got rid of it by watching out for danger in the rear, or walking through his car to see if he could not be of service to any of the passengers in the way of lowering windows or adjusting shutters.

Belford took no notice of him, but neither did he blame him for any neglected duty, and, mindful of past experience, Rob felt that this was something for which he ought to be duly thankful.

Promptly at 8:57 the train ran into the station at Philadelphia, and first going up to his closet in the trainmen's room, Rob changed his clothes, and then hurried off to the Gaddises'.

How soundly he slept that day! It was fortunate that he had a roommate, otherwise he might have slumbered on until past midnight. As it was, he was

awakened by the advent of Mr. Anthony Badgewood and the splashing he made in washing his face.

Badgewood was the same meek, apologetic creature he had been the night before, and he and Rob grew no better acquainted. He went out again immediately after dinner, leaving Rob with the room to himself.

The latter used the time before it was necessary to start for the station in writing a letter home to Dick and Sadie, telling of the successful completion of his first run, describing his boarding place, and closing without mention of either the incident of his being left behind by his train while flagging, or that which had befallen him in the New York hotel. This duty fulfilled, he read the papers he had collected in his car until half an hour before train time.

CHAPTER XV.

A TERRIBLE DISCOVERY.

It seemed as if all Rob's hard knocks in his new career had been crowded into that first night's run, for after that memorable experience the days went by uneventfully, each one making him more thoroughly at home in his work. Even the weather seemed to favor him, and, when it did rain, it so happened that there were no signals against them, so that he was not obliged to go back in the wet with his flag.

On his second run he made the acquaintance of Tom Peek, the other forward brakeman. He found him to be a rollicking fellow, full of fun, and with a stock of railroad anecdotes that whiled many an hour away as they were told on the platform between the two cars while the train sped on through the night.

On arriving in Jersey City Rob usually betook himself to the trainmen's room and slept for an hour or two. At the other end of the line he devoted the time on his hands between dinner and midnight to getting the exercise he felt he needed by taking long walks

through the city. Once he went out at the same time with Badgewood, and the latter seemed terribly nervous, as if afraid that his roommate was going to follow him up. The fellow and his occupation remained as great a mystery as ever, but Rob felt that this strange reserve was preferable to too effusive friendliness.

One morning toward the close of the week our hero had a surprise. His train had just hauled out of Chelsea, and he was walking through the car to his favorite position on the rear platform, when somebody touched him on the arm and exclaimed, "Aren't you going to speak to a fellow?"

It was George Frame. Rob had not seen him since that Sunday afternoon when they had parted under such peculiar circumstances beside Webb Hillman's buggy. Now he was delighted to find that George had got over his pique and was full of curiosity to hear all about his friend's new career.

"You look just immense in that uniform, Rob," said George when our young brakeman had slipped into the vacant seat beside him. "I'm glad the P. C. doesn't run through Westford, as I shouldn't have any show with the young ladies at all. You're not going to wear it when you come home Sundays, are you?" he added with assumed anxiety.

"No; don't be worried," laughed Rob.

He wondered whether George would say anything about the man in the buggy, and determined for his part that he would not mention the matter unless the other did. But George did not allude to the affair.

"Isn't it queer how all this came about?" he exclaimed. "Do you remember that morning you came back from Griggsville, so discouraged because you couldn't get a place at setting type on the paper there?"

"Indeed I do," answered Rob. "I little thought then that before I got home I would meet with an adventure that would lead to this. But where are you going? To Philadelphia?"

"Yes, to get a suit of clothes. Wish it was to be as fine a one as yours."

The two chatted till the train arrived and then parted, George promising to call over and see Rob at the farm when the latter returned home for Sunday.

"I'm glad he bears no grudge," thought our hero, as he started for his boarding house. "It's queer, though, I haven't run up against Hillman this week. I quite long to see the fellow again."

On reaching the Gaddises' he let himself in with his latchkey and hurried up to his room, for he always liked to get to bed as quickly as possible. But on opening the door he discovered that the bed already had an occupant,

It was Badgewood, who, with hollow eyes and pale cheeks, looked up at him appealingly, apologetically, almost pleadingly.

"I'm awfully sorry," he murmured in a weak voice. "I tried to throw it off and get up, but I couldn't. I'm too sick."

Here was an unpleasant complication. Rob pitied the poor fellow before him from the bottom of his heart. It is bad enough to be sick in a boarding house at any time, but to be ill while occupying a bed that belongs to somebody else is deplorable indeed.

"Oh, don't worry about things," spoke up the young brakeman. "I can get Mr. Gaddis to fix me off all right, I guess. Does he know you are sick?"

"No; nobody does. I—I wasn't well enough to get up and tell them," answered the other simply. "The girl was here to make the bed, but I just told her she couldn't come in."

Rob went down stairs, found Mr. Gaddis in the pantry counting preserve jars, and laid the matter before him.

"Annoying, very," was his comment. "Let me see, where will I put you? The only place I have is our down room, the back parlor. I'll let down the bed for you there."

This was accordingly done, and Rob was soon estab-

lished in his new quarters. But they were decidedly noisy, both from the singing of the cook that was wafted in from the kitchen in the rear, and the gossiping of Mrs. and Miss Spoffer, who were entertaining callers nearly all the morning in the front parlor.

He gave it up about four o'clock, and, dressing himself, went out for a walk down busy Chestnut Street. He hoped he might meet George, but he did not, and finally returned to the house to dinner, feeling tired and rather out of sorts, owing to loss of sleep.

Badgewood was no better, and poor Rob began to fear that he was in for a long-continued barring-out from his room.

"Do something for others if you feel grumpy and blue at any time," had been one of Mrs. Marston's maxims, and determined to try the efficacy of the remedy for the blues on this occasion, Rob went up after dinner to offer to read to the patient. But he found him asleep.

"He doesn't want a light here, and I don't care about sitting in the dark," mused Rob. "I wonder—"

At this moment a voice in the hallway outside broke in on his meditations.

"I say, Marston, I hear Badgewood's sick and can't go to see his girl tonight. What do you say to our going to the theater together? Dutch treat, you know."

This just struck in with Rob's desires, although if the idea had not been suggested to him he would not have gone. He felt that he ought not to go into such extravagances till after he had received his first month's pay. However, there seemed nothing else for him to do under the circumstances, so off he went with Brainerd.

The play they saw was only a mediumly interesting one, and Rob felt that his attendance at the theater had only tired him the more. However, he bade Brainerd a cheerful good-night at the station, trusting that when when once under way on his train he would be all right.

Late in the evening a fog had descended over the city, making everything damp and chilly. Rob hoped that they might run out of it, but the further eastward they ran the worse the weather seemed to grow.

They had passed Chelsea, and were half-way to New York when the train came to a halt between stations. Rob had noticed another train bound west, standing still, a few moments before, and now, when armed with his red lights and torpedoes he started out up the track, he wondered who the flagman on the other was, and if he would come far enough back for them to meet.

But, although he could see the two red lamps of the train plainly enough, he saw no other light between.

"That's queer," thought Rob. "Where can the fellow be?"

At that instant he stumbled over something lying across the track and nearly fell. As soon as he recovered his balance he held his light so as to see what it was.

"Great George!" he exclaimed.

For the red glare shone on the face of Webb Hillman, who, in his brakeman's uniform, was lying prostrate across the ties, his red lamp shattered on the ground beside him, and an empty bottle only a short distance away.

At that instant Rob heard the whistle of his own engine, calling him in.

CHAPTER XVI.

FOR HIS FRIEND'S SAKE.

"What shall I do? I can't leave Hillman here in this condition. And yet to desert my train!"

Rob turned wildly first one way, then the other, vacillating for a moment; then, with sudden determination, he dashed back down the track toward his car, pressed the air signal underneath the platform as he had done that first night, and, turning about again, hurried back to the spot where the other brakeman lay.

Just as he reached him the whistle of Hillman's engine sounded.

"I must give them the signal, too," Rob told himself; and, breathless almost as he was, he repeated the run he had just made, this time in the opposite direction.

A young man was standing on the rear platform of Hillman's car, and Rob caught his look of wonder when he noticed the brakeman turn back after starting the train.

"I wonder if he will make the conductor stop to investigate?" Rob asked himself, and in considerable anxiety he listened for two sharp whistles. But none were heard, and when he got back to the prostrate form of his fellow brakeman, the red lights of both trains were out of sight.

"And now comes the hardest task of all," murmured the young fellow as he knelt beside the unconscious man. "How shall I rouse him, and when I *have* roused him, what am I going to do with him?"

For one instant he wished that he had not come quite so far back. In that case he would now be on his train, comfortably leaning back in a cushioned seat instead of out in this damp, foggy atmosphere with an intoxicated man to look after. Then, again, would it not have been better for him to have given notice of the facts of the case to the other trainmen? Hillman could then have been sure of being taken care of—and dismissed the next day, and the news of his disgrace would bring sorrow to that sweet-faced old lady who loved him so.

No, Rob felt that he could not have done differently had he had the opportunity of choice presented to him all over again. He must save Hillman for one more trial.

Bending down, he shook him gently.

"Hillman, Hillman!" he called. "Rouse up. You are on the track."

The other stirred, opened his eyes, and "Hello, Marston!" he exclaimed. "Where did you come from?"

"From my train, to save you," replied Rob, taking him by the shoulders.

He was glad to find that the fellow was not so far gone as he had been that Sunday afternoon. Thus he had little trouble in inducing him to get on his feet, and, steadying his steps, he led him off the tracks to one side. "Stay here a minute," he said, leaving him leaning against a pile of ties.

Then Rob hurried back and snatched up the lamps.

"I don't care to stop any trains just now," he told himself, as he put out the red light and held the white one aloft to examine into his surroundings.

But the mist was so thick that he could not see ten feet away from him. From his week's experience on the road, however, he calculated that they must be very near the outskirts of Hadley, close to which he remembered that there was a house that stood by itself.

"That can't be far from here," he reflected. "I think I'll try to get Hillman in there."

But now a new obstacle arose to confront him. Their uniforms would betray the fact that they were

employees of the railroad. There was no disguising what was the matter with Hillman, and so to go to a house with him might prove as detrimental to his prospects as to have boarded the train. But still they must go somewhere till the fellow got over the effects of the liquor. Then they could stop a train or go to the nearest station and board one.

And what then? What reason could Rob give for his desertion of his post? This would be a vital matter, but there was no time to consider it now. His first duty lay with Hillman.

He found the latter still leaning against the pile of ties, but he was drawing his hand across his eyes as though to recall something.

"Hillman," exclaimed Rob, seizing him suddenly by the arm, "do you know where you are? Do you realize what you have done?"

Rob spoke sharply, and his manner had the desired effect. The other started back, opened his eyes, gazed around him for an instant, and then fell forward with his head on Rob's shoulder.

"My train?" he gasped. "What has become of it?"

"I sent it on," answered Rob. "I found you lying across the track with your lamp broken. Oh, Hillman, how could you fall so soon again, and where did you get the liquor?"

"It was Von Gasbeck's; I promised to carry a flask to him. I had it in my pocket. When I went back to flag, it was cold and damp. I know the stuff was there. I had to wait some time. Heaven knows, Marston, I fought the temptation, but it was no use. I couldn't stand it. I whipped out the flask, drained the last drop—you know I'd not touched the stuff since I saw you that Sunday—and it upset me completely. For one instant I realized what I had done—knew myself for a thief as well as a promise-breaker, dashed the bottle from me, and then knew no more till you roused me."

Hillman had raised his head while speaking, but kept it turned away from Rob, and as he finished, bowed it on his hands, while his whole frame shook convulsively. Rob pitied him from the bottom of his heart, but could think of nothing to say in reply.

Reproaches would be of no avail, for the poor fellow could not be made to realize more keenly than he did the enormity of his offense. Nor, on the other hand, did Rob feel justified in saying anything hopeful. For here it was only a short time since that Sunday, and the weak one had fallen again.

Still, he could not stand there and see the fellow in such utter misery. He stepped forward and laid his hand on his shoulder.

The gesture must have been a comforting one, for

Hillman turned quickly, with the exclamation: "Thank you, Marston, for not despising me utterly. But what have you done for me already? You must have let your train go on. Tell me, did you?"

Hillman turned suddenly and grasped Rob by the hand.

"I couldn't let you lie there, Hillman," was the boy's reply.

"Then you were on a run, and will have to explain."

"No, I won't betray you, Hillman," broke in Rob, thinking he understood the drift of the other's words. "I can—"

"No, you musn't try. I wasn't thinking of myself at all, but of you. You are sure to get into trouble for this night's work, but don't worry. I will fix matters for you, and I will never forget all you've done for me."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SEQUEL.

"Why, hold on, Hillman! Where are you going?"

Rob was so surprised by his companion's next action that for an instant he could do nothing but stand still and call for him. For, as soon as he had finished the speech with which the preceding chapter closed, the fellow made a sudden dash to the right and sped off into the darkness.

There was no answer, or, if there was, Rob could not hear it, for at that moment a freight rumbled past and all other sounds were drowned in the roar its jolting cars created. Rob did not wait until it had gotter past, but started off in the direction in which he had seen Hillman disappear.

He had gone but a few yards, however, when he realized the futility of this pursuit. How could he hope to overtake anyone on that dark, foggy night? He could not even see his own way clearly, for every now and again he stumbled across a gully or stubbed his toe on a stone in the path.

He pulled himself up and considered matters, standing still in the short grass bordering the track.

He felt hurt at the treatment he had received. After all he had done for this new friend, to be deserted in this way seemed little short of rank ingratitude.

"Can it be possible that he is still under the influence of the liquor?" Rob wondered.

But that did not seem possible. He had been rational enough in the last words he had spoken. Then he had promised indirectly that Rob would hear from him again, for what else could his "I will fix matters for you" mean? And yet he might have had the grace to stay and keep company with his preserver, for Rob could not disguise from himself the fact that had he not discovered Hillman's condition just when he did the consequences might have been most serious, involving more lives than one possibly.

"I half believe I ought to mind my own business and let other people attend to theirs," muttered Rob, as he thought of all these things. "Here I am in a pretty fix—and all for a fellow I haven't known three months."

It did seem hard, and the worst of it was that the present inconvenience of being stranded in the small hours of the morning without shelter was not the end of the offense, nor, possibly, the worst of it. This

would make the second time he had been left behind in a month, and, whereas on the first occasion he could furnish a good excuse, now he could give none without implicating Hillman. He knew that the station-master had a record of all the incidents of every train's trip furnished him. What would he say when he read of the duplicated shortcomings of Flagman Marston?

"I can't stand here all night and borrow trouble, though," Rob presently decided.

But, what to do and where to go was the question. The nearest station was Hyde Junction. His train back in the morning stopped there; he had better find some place to stay close by, so that he would be ready to board it.

He took out his watch and held it by the lamp. It was half-past one, not a very promising hour at which to endeavor to secure a night's lodging.

"I'd be sure to be taken for a burglar," Rob reasoned, as he halted in front of the small house already mentioned.

He was sleepy, in spite of all the excitement he had just undergone, for it will be remembered that he had not had his full day's rest.

The house before which he had halted was a plain, two-story structure, built with one end facing the railroad, and in this end there were no windows. On one

end there was a porch, partially inclosed. It was the side that was sheltered from the wind, and Rob was strongly tempted to venture inside, stretch himself out on the floor, and allow his desire for slumber to have full swing.

But two things restrained him; one was the fear of soiling his uniform, the other was the possibility that he might not waken until the family were astir in the morning. And Rob had a strong disinclination to being taken for a tramp.

So he turned away and resumed his march down the line in the direction of Hyde Junction.

Presently he observed a light advancing toward him. It grew steadily brighter and soon Rob made out that it was a lamp held by some one walking along the track toward him.

"Can it be any of our fellows?" he asked himself, thinking of his brother brakemen.

But as the other came closer he discovered that he wore no uniform and carried in one hand an iron bar with a wrench arrangement at either end. It was a track-walker.

"Hullo, what you doin' here?" demanded the latter as the two came face to face.

"Trying to find a place to sleep," answered Rob, concisely.

"But where's your train?" went on the track-walker, who was a young man, his face bronzed and seamed by his constant exposure to the elements.

"Gone on to Jersey City. I was left while flagging. Say, do you know whether I will find the station at Hyde Junction open or not?"

"No; 'twon't be open this time o' night, but if you want some place to sleep, maybe you could get in the boiler-room. They does the pumpin' there for the water-troughs, yer knows."

"Much obliged. Guess I'll do that then," said Rob, and adding "Good night" he moved on.

It took him twenty minutes of rather rapid walking to reach the Junction. Here he found the boiler-room open just as the track-walker had said, and briefly telling the man in charge that he had been left by "14" and wanted to wait for "23," he picked out a clean spot and threw himself on the floor.

The next thing he knew a rough, but friendly voice was calling in his ear: "Wake up, man, wake up; 23's almost here!"

Rob sprang to his feet, all in a daze. He could not imagine where he was and had not much time given him in which to gather his wits together. Engine No. 1329 was thundering along the rails, close to the station, and almost before he realized that he was at Hyde

Junction he was being whirled rapidly away from it. Then, as he rubbed his eyes, he made out that there was a brakeman on this rear car—his car—whom he had never seen before, a middle-aged man, who made no effort to open an acquaintance.

“I suppose I must report to Belford,” Rob told himself, but at that moment the conductor came through, and catching sight of him, said in his sternest tone: “You don’t belong here, sir. Go forward to the smoker.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE BLOW FALLS.

Now, Rob did not at all fancy riding in the smoking car. He did not smoke himself, and the odor of the poor cigars and pipes that more frequently than otherwise made the air of this particular car heavy with their noxious fumes was particularly distasteful to him. But Conductor Belford was his superior officer, so there was nothing to do but obey him.

"I suppose it's all right for them to have gotten somebody else to take my place for this trip," Rob mused, "but I don't like the outlook."

At this point in his meditations Cal Brown, who alternated with Archie Hyde as forward brakeman, came in and took a seat beside him.

"Hello, Marston," he began. "What happened to you? This is the second time you've been left behind this month, isn't it?"

"Yes," was Rob's brief response.

"How was it? Wouldn't Lanning (the engineer) wait for you?" went on the other.

"Ye—es," answered Rob, hesitatingly. "In fact, I gave the signal to him to go on."

"Whew, and didn't get aboard yourself! That looks bad. It can't be that you slipped and fell again the same as you did that Monday night?"

"No, I—"

But at this point Belford appeared and called Brown away, and the latter did not approach Rob again during the trip.

"One minute, Marston, before you go."

It was Belford's voice calling him back as he was walking off after the train had run into the station at Philadelphia.

"Let me see," went on the conductor, "have I your address here in town?"

Rob named it, the other noted it down in his book, and then dismissed him with a curt: "That's all."

"It *isn't* all, by a good deal, I'll venture to say," Rob told himself as he changed his clothes. "Not one word as to the cause of my being left, nor any chance given me to explain, even if I wanted to. If—if it wasn't for one thing I believe I'd go to Mr. Cutler this minute and tell him just the facts of the case."

This one thing was the sweet face of the old lady in Red Ball.

"If the facts are found out on his side of the matter,

it's no concern of mine, but I've promised to screen him for my part, and I will. I wonder how Badgewood is? If he isn't any better I've half a mind to give up my room and get another when I come back Monday."

Mr. Badgewood *was* no better, as Rob was informed by Mr. Gaddis, who opened the door for him. In fact, he was a good deal worse, so the landlord had nothing to say when Rob told him he was going home for over Sunday and would therefore give up his room now.

"I think I'd better go to Westford at eleven o'clock, too," he added. "Can I get my things now?"

"Oh, you can leave them here if you like; I will charge you nothing for storage," replied the shrewd Mr. Gaddis.

This Rob decided to do, and after procuring a few things that he would need during the next two days, determined to return to the station and wait there in the trainmen's room till it was time to start to Chelsea.

He was on the point of leaving the house, when a man whom Rob thought he had seen before, but couldn't place, sprang up the steps and demanded: "Does Robert Marston live here?"

"Yes, here he is now," replied Rob, extending his hand for the letter he saw the fellow held.

"Oh, are you the fellow? Well, here's something for you," and thrusting the envelope into Rob's hand he turned and walked quickly away.

"P. C. R." These were the letters in the corner of the envelope that smote dismay to Rob's heart. He knew now where he had seen the man who had brought it—about the station.

He pulled the door shut and leaned back against the jamb while he tore open one end and drew out the inclosure. It was but a single slip of paper, with only a few lines written on it. These, however, told that which was to cause their reader days of unhappiness. Here they are:

"ROBERT MARSTON—You are hereby notified that you are suspended indefinitely from the employment of our company.
HORACE CUTLER,
Station-Master."

"I expected it. Why should it come on me as a shock?"

This was what Rob asked himself when he suddenly realized that he had been leaning against the door bell for an indefinite period and that a young woman who had come up the steps and wanted to get in was looking for it.

"I beg your pardon," he said, and snatching up his bundle, hurried off as though he had an important appointment to keep.

As a matter of fact, he had nowhere to go, for naturally he did not care about lingering around the station any longer than was necessary. Indeed, he did not know where he was going for quite a time, till he found progress somewhat impeded by the crowd and discovered that he was in the busiest part of Chestnut Street.

"What will Dick and Sadie say? And George Frame? And after his telling me that they would all be so anxious to see me in my uniform?"

Cannot our readers imagine just what poor Rob's thoughts would be under the circumstances? I am sure they can, so I will not stop to describe them. He walked and walked, not taking note of where he was going, but suddenly, happening to glance up at a clock in a jeweler's window, discovered that it was half-past ten, and time to start for the station.

"I suppose I'll have to pay my fare," he reflected. "And this is Dick's money, and I was going to pay him back when I got my first month's salary!"

Every now and then he endeavored to comfort himself by the thought that he had brought himself where he was by an act of kindness, and at these moments a ray of hope would cross his mind at the recollection of Hillman's promise to "fix things for him."

"But what can he do?" was his next reflection,

"He's as deep in the mud—and deeper—as I am in the mire."

And in this spirit he arrived at Chelsea, traveling on a train, as it happened, where he knew no one. He started immediately on his walk to Westford. It was a fine autumn day, and he could not help but think in what an exhilarated frame of mind he would have been on this same walk had not that incident of last night occurred.

Poor Rob, he did not know yet how very much harder the breaking of the news was going to be than even his worst anticipations had pictured it.

It was half-past one when he turned in at the familiar gateway. He did not see Dick about the place, but as soon as he opened the kitchen door there he was, sitting at the table with Sadie, both evidently discussing some subject of the gravest import.

CHAPTER XIX.

A TRYING ORDEAL.

"Why, Rob, you startled me for a minute. We expected you, too, but such a wonderful thing has happened, and Dick and I were so full of it that—I'm awfully glad to see you. How do you do?"

Sadie had turned with a start when Rob stepped forward with the announcement, "Here I am."

"Something wonderful happened!" he said quickly, when the greetings were over, and he had taken Sadie's seat opposite Dick, while she bustled about to get him something to eat. "What is it?"

"We've sold the place and are going to move out on Monday," announced Sadie, with a flourish of the frying pan she had just picked up. "There, now, I've had the fun of breaking the news, do you, Dick, tell him all about it. If I try to do it, he'd grow hungry before I got through."

For the moment Rob forgot his troubles in the depth of his amazement.

"Sold the place!" he gasped out, "and going to

move out on Monday! Why, who bought it, and where are you going to move to?"

"To Chicago," replied Sadie, who was so elated by the prospect that she couldn't remain quiet and allow Dick to answer the questions. "I never knew things turn out so conveniently all around. Here you are, settled down at work on the railroad"—poor Rob winced—"so we needn't worry about breaking up your home; then along came Dr. Train, and says the east corner wasn't big enough for him, and he must have the whole place. He's met some rich men who are going to build—what is it they call it, Dick?"

"A sanitarium," replied Dick, "a place for invalids to come and stay all the time under the doctor's care."

"Yes, Rob," went on Sadie, "and they want to break ground right away, so we must move, and so we're going to accept an offer Dick had only Tuesday from an old school-friend of his—to go into partnership with him in the locksmith business out in Chicago. The money we get for the place will be just enough to take us out there and buy an interest for Dick."

"You see, Grimshaw has been running the business for four or five years by himself," Dick struck in at this point; "so he's got a good trade and only wants a partner so he can travel a bit. His wife's health isn't very good. So we're in great luck, aren't we, Rob, my

boy? And now tell us all about yourself. How do you like life on the road?"

"How can I tell them now? How can I tell them now?" This was the refrain that kept beating against poor Rob's temples while the others were talking.

"I can't do it," he now decided. "It would be too cruel."

He had to say something, though, so trying to assume a light heartedness that he felt convinced must seem as out of place as an ill-fitting coat, he replied: "Oh, yes, I like it immensely; but then we'll have lots of time to talk about that. You must have a great deal to do to get ready. I can't realize yet that you're going. Let me help you."

So Dick took him up stairs, where there was a box to pack with such of the household effects as they had decided to take with them. And as the two worked together Rob's heart grew heavier and heavier. Things had now got beyond the merely disagreeable pass, when his principal source of disquiet was at the prospect of having to tell of his suspension. Now he was confronted with the problem of existence.

With the old place still to fall back on, he could have helped Dick about the farm while hunting up a new situation or waiting for possible reinstatement on the railroad. Now what was to become of him?

To be sure, he had some twenty-five dollars of the sum loaned him by Dick, but *that* he had expected to pay back on receipt of his first month's wages.

"Shall I go back to Philadelphia or remain here?" he asked himself, but almost immediately he decided that it would be better to go back. "Then perhaps Sadie and Dick needn't know about it—till I write them that I have another place."

It was a trying afternoon for him, however. Dick was full of enthusiasm over his prospects, and naturally expected his foster brother to rejoice with him. But I know of no more forlorn occupation than that of forcing ourselves to laugh when we feel more like weeping; so it was fortunate for Rob's secret that Sadie and Dick were so entirely absorbed in the sudden good fortune that had come to them that they had not time to note any shortcomings in Rob's sympathetic joy.

The boy's hardest trial, though, was on Sunday afternoon when George Frame came over, accompanied by Frank Dean and Tom Pond, two other schoolmates of Rob's.

"They're both wild to go to town, Rob," said George, "and see you run the train. When are you going to have your photograph taken in uniform? Remember we all want copies."

All three plied him with questions about life on the

railroad, wanted to know when he expected to be promoted to be a conductor, and Tom actually wished to know if he couldn't use his influence to get a place for him.

"You're off for today, aren't you?" said Frank. "But you only get pay for the time you work, isn't that so?"

"Yes," said Rob, feeling as if he couldn't stand it very much longer.

"And when do you get on your train again?" pursued Frank.

"Yes, Sadie, I'm coming."

This was the only device Rob could think of to avoid answering this question—pretending to hear a call from his sister and hurrying into the house and up stairs. But his cheeks burned at the realization of the close bordering on deception the keeping of his secret called upon him to practice.

"I've half a mind to tell them all the whole truth," he muttered to himself, and started back to the porch where he had left the boys.

But just as he reached it there was a crash out by the road, and the cry was raised, "Deacon Thurston's bull has broken out and knocked down the fence!"

Of course there was a stampede to capture the animal, and in the excitement thus occasioned, which

was sufficient to last all the afternoon, Rob's railroad experiences were suffered to rest.

The evening was devoted to quiet talk among the three concerning the future.

"Of course, Rob," said Sadie, "it would be ever so nice if we could have you with us. But we don't know just where we are going to live yet, so perhaps it is just as well that you are nicely settled in Philadelphia."

They all rode over to Chelsea together Monday morning in Deacon Thurston's farm wagon. Sadie's eyes were wet as she looked her last at the old house, and Dick and Rob were silent till the place was shut out by a turn in the road.

The two bound for the West had decided to take the train when it stopped at Chelsea, and not wait over in Philadelphia.

"We can get whatever we want in Chicago," said Sadie, "and shan't have the trouble and expense of carrying things."

So the good-byes were said in the train, and at Philadelphia Rob left them to face for the first time the problem of being *obliged* to earn his daily bread.

CHAPTER XX.

AN UNEXPECTED OPENING.

Where now? This was the question that seemed written over every signboard on the street as Rob walked out of the Philadelphia station that morning.

Instinctively, as he left the building, his footsteps turned in the direction of the Gaddis house; but why he should go there he did not know.

"Unless," and his heart gave a great bound as the thought occurred to him, "unless Hillman has kept his promise, made things right with the railroad company, and there is a letter there for me, asking me to come back."

This possibility, faint though he felt it to be, put fresh energy into him, and he hurried along as though he had an appointment to keep.

Mr. Gaddis, as usual, opened the door for him.

"Back again, are you?" he said. "Want your things? I'm sorry to tell you that Mr. Badgewood is no better."

"Then perhaps I'd better take them," said Rob.

"But I wanted particularly to find out if there was a letter here for me."

"I'm sure I can't say. Bridget took one up stairs this morning. I don't know whether it was for you or Badgewood."

"I'll run up and see," said Rob eagerly, and it took him scarcely a minute to reach the fourth floor.

Badgewood's feeble voice murmured a faint "Come in" to his knock, and entering, Rob found his late roommate sitting up in bed, an open letter in his hand, and an expression of utter misery on his wan and emaciated countenance.

"I'm sorry I'm no better," he said, when he saw who it was. "They told me you had gone away."

"Yes, and I just came back to see if there were any letters for me. Do you know if there are?" and Rob's anxious glance strayed keenly about the little room.

"No, this for me was the only one," and the sick man's sorrowful expression grew even more lugubrious as his eyes fell on the missive which he had just dropped on the coverlet, as if he lacked the strength to hold even such a feather-weight. Then he added, in an entirely unexpected burst of confidence: "It's from my firm. They say they're tired of waiting for me to get well, and must hire somebody else if I don't come back right away."

If anybody was in a condition to sympathize with a fellow being deprived of a position, it was Rob.

"That's a shame, isn't it?" he said. "Have you been with them long?"

"About a year. If I could only get somebody to take my place for a little while—till I get well! For I must get well soon, or else die, and then of course it won't matter about the place."

As he added this last, Badgewood laughed very weakly. It was the first time Rob had ever seen him give way to mirth, and it seemed wholly in keeping with the character of the fellow that his joke should be such a ghastly one.

"But of course," he went on after a minute, "I couldn't hope to find anybody who'd be willing to take a situation temporarily like that. Maybe you'd do it, though."

The thought seemed to have come to him like a flash. He leaned far forward in bed, and put one of his thin, almost transparent hands on Rob's coat sleeve. Then, talking rapidly, he went on:

"Maybe you want to make a little extra money—to save up for Christmas. You only work at night, and you could get some sleep down at the store. It isn't hard work; you have a chair to sit in. And you could keep all you made, of course; only I would want

you to let me have the place again when I get well. What do you say? Will you do it?"

While Badgewood had been speaking so hurriedly Rob had been thinking fast. Why should he not take up with the offer, temporary though it was? Of course, had he been still in the employ of the railroad, he could not have thought it possible for him to carry on the two employments. But now? There was no letter announcing his reinstatement, he had no prospect of obtaining anything to do, and here was something that would bring him in something, and perhaps by the time Badgewood was well again that *possible* reconciliation with the P. C. R. would have been effected.

"I'll do it, Badgewood," he said impulsively.

"Oh, will you?" cried the sick man, a gleam of real pleasure lighting up the eyes that were ordinarily so downcast, and he let his fingers slip down from Rob's sleeve till they clasped his hand with a grateful pressure.

Then, on a sudden, a shadow crossed his face; he dropped Rob's hand and said anxiously: "But perhaps you won't want to do it when you know what the work is."

"Well, it can't be very hard," laughed Rob. "You said I might snatch a nap over it now and then, you know."

"Oh, it isn't that part of it," returned the other, moving uneasily in his bed. "Maybe you wouldn't like to wear the—the uniform."

"Why should I mind that? I've had to wear one on the railroad every night."

"But—but mine is different," and Rob actually detected a gleam of color coming into Badgewood's pallid cheeks.

"Come, tell me what it is, and have it over with. I'll warrant it isn't half as bad as you make out."

"I'm afraid you'll think it is worse, but—but I couldn't get anything else, and—and there is another reason why I wanted to be at Madame Velours's."

"Madame Velours!" exclaimed Rob in considerable surprise. "Why, is your employer a lady?"

"Yes, on Chestnut Street. Don't you know the place?"

"Can't say that I do," responded Rob, whose curiosity was now thoroughly aroused.

Till this moment he had been so absorbed in his own prospects that he had failed to realize that he was on the eve of being intrusted with Anthony Badgewood's secret.

"What sort of business is she in?" he asked, point blank.

"Dressmaking," answered Badgewood, dropping back on the pillow as he uttered the word.

Rob was certainly amazed, if he was not horrified. In all the thought he had ever given to the possible branch of trade that could engage his roommate's services, he had never imagined anything at all approaching this. Dressmaking! What under the sun could a fellow like Badgewood find to do in such an establishment?

"What do you do there?" he inquired, as soon as he had recovered from his astonishment.

"I'm hallman, footman, door-opener, or whatever you choose to call it," answered Badgewood, sitting up again, and once more talking fast, as though anxious to get the announcement over with. "Have to be dressed up like a lackey, you know, in dark blue coat, red vest, and knee breeches, white silk stockings, pumps, and a powdered wig. All the things are down at the place, and I think they'll fit you."

Badgewood fell back again as though exhausted, and Rob leaned against the wall, while a long drawn "Phew!" escaped his lips.

CHAPTER XXI.

AT MADAME VELOURS'S.

"I *thought* you'd be disgusted when you found out what the work was."

Badgewood spoke in a resigned tone, as though he had fully made up his mind that Rob was going to "back out."

"I haven't said I was disgusted," was the latter's response. "I was only a little staggered at first. How did you ever come to get such a position?"

Badgewood did not reply immediately. Once more the color stole into his pale cheeks and he half averted his head.

"I knew somebody there," he replied after an instant.

"And how much do they pay you?" went on Rob.

"Forty dollars a month, and furnish the costume."

"And you dress there, I suppose."

"Oh, yes; in a little room under the front stoop. It's pretty cold in winter, but then I hurry, so I don't mind much. Will—will you really go down there and

see about taking the place, and tell them I sent you?"

"Certainly, I shan't go back on my promise, though I shall certainly feel rather queer among a lot of women like that. But it's honest work and nobody ought to be ashamed of that. I'll go down right off and see about it. Maybe they won't want me, though."

"No fear of that. I'm only afraid they won't want to give you up when I'm ready to come back."

"I'm afraid you're a flatterer, Badgewood," smiled Rob. Somehow talking with this timid, shrinking fellow had put some of his old spirit into him. Or was it the prospect of a situation, albeit that of a lackey? "What's the number?—and I'll go down there at once."

Badgewood gave it and Rob started off.

"What a come-down from a P. C. brakeman," he reflected as he hurried along the streets, and more than once it seemed to him as if he could not bring himself to do the thing.

"But what nonsense," his better sense argued. "Beggars can't be choosers. Besides, I'm only doing it to oblige poor Badgewood."

Of the fact that these two reasons were decidedly contradictory, he made no account; but gritting his teeth, he resolved to go through with what he had undertaken.

He found the establishment of Madame Velours to be an exceedingly ornate one, with an abundance of gilt on the sign that flanked the doorway, and the arms of England, France, and Denmark mingled in friendliest juxtaposition over the top. Rob never had felt so bashful in his life as when he ascended the broad stone steps, opened the front door, and then halted in the hallway, trying to summon courage to enter the front parlor at his right, where he caught glimpses of handsomely attired ladies passing back and forth, or engaged in conversation with young girls in black dresses and white aprons.

One of the latter, while temporarily disengaged, chanced to notice him, and not giving himself time to reflect further, Rob walked up to her and announced that he would like to see Madame Velours for a moment.

"Madame is very much occupied just now," replied the girl. "What did you wish to see her about?"

"About—about the position of door-tender."

Rob hesitated for a second, then brought it out with a sort of gulp.

The effect on his hearer was startlingly unexpected. The girl gave a half scream, which she immediately tried to stifle, and then answered:

"But we have a doorman—that is, he's sick now, but we expect him back soon."

"I know," rejoined Rob. "He sent me."

"Oh, tell me how he is! Are you a friend of his, and have you seen him?"

Rob was quite taken aback by the sudden alteration in the manner of the young woman. She had been repellent before; now she had come up to him, almost imploringly.

"Yes, I have just come from Mr. Badgewood," he said. "He is still confined to his bed, and wants me to take his place till he gets well."

"Oh, does he?" cried the girl delightedly. "Come right away with me to madame."

"Great Cæsar, I believe I begin to understand things now," said Rob to himself, as he followed his guide through the hall to another door that opened into the parlor at the rear. "This girl must be either Badgewood's wife or his sweetheart, and he took up with this place for the sake of being near her. And he must have gone to her house every evening when he went out."

But now he had been ushered into an inner apartment, filled with girls; they were so many that he did not attempt to count them. A tall woman with raven black hair and a heavy gold watch-chain depending from the front of her dress was just about to enter the front room when "Badgewood's young woman," as Rob called her to himself, stopped her.

"One minute, madame," she said. "This young man would like to speak with you about taking Anthony's place at the door till he is better."

"Ye-es?" and madame, who had a slightly foreign accent, took a pair of gold-rimmed eyeglasses from a hook on the bosom of her dress, and, setting them astride her nose, took a leisurely survey of Rob. "Will the clothes fit him? "

"I think so, madame; he's about Anthony's height," responded the young girl, her voice fairly trembling with eagerness, and her hands fluttering.

"Let him go down and try them on," said madame majestically. "Then let me know when he is ready for inspection."

So saying, she passed through the folding doors into the front parlor, and the girl, in a flutter of excitement, conducted Rob down the stairway to the basement.

"Did—did Mr. Badgewood send me any message?" she inquired on the way.

"None," answered Rob, and then he was ushered into the little space under the front stoop, where he found a gas bracket and the articles comprising the doorman's gorgeous rig.

"I feel as if I belonged to New York's Four Hundred and was dressing for a fancy ball," he reflected, as he proceeded to put on the garments.

They certainly did fit him remarkably well, and when he reached the upper hall again, where there was a tall mirror, he stood transfixed for an instant at the brilliant spectacle. Mr. Badgewood's girl had been on the watch for him, and soon hurried off to announce to madame that the footman was ready for inspection.

She arrived in the course of five minutes, and, elevating her glasses, took one look, then clapped her hands softly, and exclaimed: "Excellent! *Magnifique!* We shall not need Monsieur Anthony any more at all."

Rob and the young girl looked at one another in consternation, for it certainly seemed as if the former's offer to be obliging had resulted in causing Mr. Badgewood to lose his position instead of aiding him to keep it.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE MISSING LETTER.

"Madame Velours," Rob began, "I cannot stay permanently. I only took the position temporarily to oblige a friend. And what would he think if I should keep it?"

"I care not what he thinks," replied the madame, imperiously. "That is nothing. It is what I desire. Go now to your place by the door."

The young girl's face was the picture of despair, and Rob saw that the only thing to do was to come out boldly and throw the whole thing over at once.

"And what *I* desire is entitled to some consideration," he said, stepping in front of the modiste as she started to re-enter the front parlor, "and now I refuse to have anything to do with the position," and without giving anybody a chance to reply, he hurried out into the hall and down to that little room under the front stoop.

It did not take him long to strip off the resplendent livery.

"I'm all at sea again," he muttered, "but I couldn't take that poor fellow's position away from him. I suppose I ought to feel flattered by the madame's preference for me, but I don't, one bit."

When he returned to the upper hall—there was no exit from the basement that he could find—the young girl was waiting for him. But all she said was, "You're awfully good," and then hurried back into the work-room as if afraid that madame might discover her.

Rob went out into the bustle of the street, and stood for a second on the sidewalk, uncertain which way to turn. It was a most dismal sensation, and he eagerly welcomed the momentary diversion offered by a small crowd that was collected in front of a building a few doors away.

He joined it, and discovered that the source of attraction was a poster setting forth the fact that in the museum within a man who was fasting for forty days on a wager had just completed his thirty-fifth day, and was but a mere handful of skin and bones. Many of the assemblage fished in their pockets for a dime, pushed their way up to the door, and went in to look upon the spectacle, which must certainly have been a slow show, to say the least.

"I wonder if anybody'd pay to see *me* starve?"

The question obtruded itself into Rob's mind with ugly pertinacity, and turning on his heel he walked away from the spot as fast as ever he could, as if nearness to it might hasten the coming of that terrible foe which is personified in the wolf.

But one cannot get away from something that is within one's self, and Rob was growing more and more conscious of the fact that he was getting terribly hungry. His watch told him that it was almost lunch time at the Gaddises', and "I'll go there," he resolved. "It's the cheapest. Besides, I ought to tell Badgewood about giving up that job. I'll feel more braced up after eating, and in proper shape to look for something new."

So he retraced his steps to the boarding house, where the door was opened by the boy Launcelot.

"Hallo," exclaimed the latter. "I just took in a letter for you."

"A letter!" cried Rob, eagerly. He was now ready to clutch at any straw by which to hang a hope. "Where is it?"

"Cricky, if I haven't forgot what I did with it!" exclaimed the small boy, dropping the wad of gum from his mouth. "You see, Tom Klings came along at the same time with his new bike, an' he offered to give me a ride 'n I went 'n don't know what I did with the let-

ter. Never thought about it again till I saw you just now."

"And do you mean to tell me that you have lost it?"

Rob's tone was very emphatic, and I am sure that my readers will admit that he had cause to be provoked.

"I—I don't know," stammered the boy, retreating a step or two and beginning to turn his pockets inside out.

Rob did not hesitate to assist him in this process, and soon a motley collection of marbles, tops, pennies, and sling-shots adorned the floor of the front hallway. But no letter turned up.

Thinking to take time by the forelock, Lanny began to blubber, trusting to escape punishment on the ground that a gentleman would scorn to strike a man when he is down. In plainer terms, he trusted that Rob would not box the ears of a boy who was already weeping for the fault he had committed.

But he need not have worried. Rob was far too much concerned with the loss of the letter to waste much thought on the loser.

"Where did you go after you got it?" he asked. "Think quick now."

"Oh, we went around the block. "I'll run an' see if I can find it."

Lanny was evidently only too anxious to get away. Rob, however, went with him, and together they made the round of the square, scrutinizing every inch of pavement, and not neglecting the gutter. But Rob was not surprised when they reached their starting point again without having seen anything of the object of their search.

"Did you notice any printing on the envelope?" he asked, thinking that if he could find out who the communication was from, he might make a guess at its contents.

"No, didn't look at nothin' 'ceptin' Tom's bike. Say, you won't tell pa, will you?"

"Answer me one more question, and I'll make up my mind," responded Rob, who had been inspired with a sudden hope. "Was it the regular postman who gave you the letter?"

"Nope; I know that 'twasn't him."

"Who was it, then?" persisted Rob.

"Don't know. Wasn't the postman, though," replied the boy, and, seizing the opportunity while his questioner was meditating on this answer, he fled into the rear regions and disappeared.

"Could that have been a note from the railroad company?" Rob asked himself. "It must have been, sent by messenger the same way the other one was. And now the question is, what was in it?"

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It was certainly highly exasperating to reflect that such an important document should be lost through a small boy's carelessness.

"I suppose the best thing for me to do now, though," Rob went on to reflect, "is to walk over to the station and find out about it. Still, if it shouldn't happen to be from there, I'd hate most awfully to be hanging about the place."

He turned to the basement stairs and went down to the dining room to lunch.

Mr. Gaddis was not at home, so he could not have reported Lanny if he had so desired. He ate his meal, scarcely knowing of what it consisted, for his brain was busier than his palate, and at its close he decided that he must risk it and go around to the railroad station.

"I'm pretty positive the letter came from them," he reasoned, "and if it did there could be only one thing they'd write about—my reinstatement. Hillman must have kept his promise."

And, inspired by this hope, he started off at once, forgetting all about Anthony Badgewood.

CHAPTER XXIII.

BACK ON THE ROAD.

"Mr. Cutler is very busy just now."

This was the answer given in response to Rob's request for an audience with the station-master, and it was possible that he would have gone away at once had not a gentleman at that moment left the office, and in the instant that the door was opened, Mr. Cutler within caught sight of Rob.

"Come right in," he called out, and leaving the other visitor who was still seated by him, he rose from his desk and came half-way down the room to meet the ex-flagman.

"So you received my letter," he began, halting with the railing between them.

"No, sir, I didn't; that's just—"

"Then what did you come here for?" and there was a suspicion of coldness in the station master's voice.

"You misunderstand me, sir," Rob hastened to explain. "A letter sent to me this morning has been lost. I thought it might have been from you. I called to find out for certain."

"Oh, I see," and Mr. Cutler thawed again at once.

"You don't know why I wanted to see you, then?" he went on.

"No, sir."

"It was because I had a letter from Webb Hillman, explaining why you were left by your train the other night. While this speaks very badly for him, it puts your conduct in an entirely new light. You are restored to your position on the road, and I shall give you a new run, one in which you will not be associated with Belford. You may report for duty tomorrow morning to take out No. 32, and will return on No. 55."

"Thank you, sir," said Rob, who realized that Mr. Cutler had a shrewd knowledge of all he had had to contend with under Belford. Then he added quickly: "May I inquire, sir, where Hillman is?"

"He gave no date. His letter was mailed in New York. Poor fellow, I fancy from the tone of it that he has given up trying to get the better of his worst self. Remember to be here by eight tomorrow. Cummings will be your conductor."

Rob left the building as though he were walking on air. Not only had he regained his position, but a much better run had been given him, for No. 32 left Philadelphia at 8:30, reaching New York three hours later. On the return he would arrive home before eight.

"Now I can sleep at night like any other civilized man," he reflected. "Or, no, I can't," was the thought that came instantly on top of it. "I haven't any place to sleep."

This brought to his mind Anthony Badgewood again.

"I've forgotten to tell him my experience at Madame Velours's," he recollected. "Poor fellow. I wonder if he'll lose his place, and where I'll sleep tonight!"

He hurried back to the Gaddises' and found the latter question solved for him in the most unexpected manner. Mr. Gaddis met him at the door and at once burst out with: "If you want all that room, Mr. Marston, you can have it now."

"Why, what's become of Badgewood?" inquired Rob, with as great amazement as relief.

"He's going to be married," replied Mr. Gaddis, in that calm tone that many people assume when they have anything of extraordinary importance to communicate.

"Married?" echoed Rob, leaning against the wall to enable him to support his astonishment. "Why, I left him sick in bed not six hours ago."

"I know, but there's been a young lady here since who said she must see him, and after a bit she came down and told me that I could have the room after

four o'clock this afternoon. She said she'd been engaged to Badgewood for ever so long, but they thought they hadn't enough money to marry on. But now he was sick and needed somebody to take care of him, and she couldn't do it unless they got married. Besides, in her boarding house they could get a room for two for only two dollars a week more than for one, so they would actually save money by becoming man and wife."

"And did Badgewood consent?" asked Rob.

"He couldn't do anything else, and seemed to get better right off. They've just gone in a carriage to the minister's. That young woman packed up everything in ten minutes. I never saw such a spry one."

"That's the second load lifted off my mind today," reflected Rob, as he went up to take exclusive possession of the little fourth-floor back.

Indeed, he felt it was almost worth while to have gone through the harrowing experience of the past few days for the sake of the state of exaltation that followed on the lifting of the clouds. He devoted the remainder of the afternoon to a long stroll through Fairmount Park, and went to bed early.

How good it seemed the next morning to go up to the trainmen's room and put on his natty uniform! And then, too, he found Cummings to be a genial fel-

low of about thirty-five, while he was no less delighted to discover that he was to have Archie Hyde for forward brakeman on the outward trip.

"You see, Hillman's leaving has made a gap for us fellows to step into," Hyde explained. "It's a shame such a fine fellow as he couldn't let drink alone. I'm afraid he'll go straight to the bad now."

Rob thought of a sweet-faced old lady in Red Ball, and he wondered if she knew what sad fate had overtaken him on whom her heart was so fondly set. He wished he could do something for her or for Hillman, but it seemed as if there was no opportunity open to him. He could not see into the future, nor had he the faintest conception of that crook in destiny's path that was now so near to him and which would once more link his fortunes with Webb Hillman's in strangest fashion.

He thoroughly enjoyed that run over to Jersey City, in spite of the twenty-odd stops the train made. His spirits were so high after their descent into the depths that he felt justified in being a little extravagant in going over to New York to lunch and to do a little sight-seeing.

Then in the afternoon he found No. 55 to be a very pleasant train, as it was an express as far as Brunswick. For this reason it carried a large number of commuters, and by the end of the week Rob knew many of them by face. Cummings seemed to take

quite a fancy to him, and it wasn't long before Rob was initiated into the mysteries of ticket-sorting, *i. e.*, separating the tickets from the different stations into their proper bundles.

In order to do this he was obliged to learn the numbers of all the stations along the line, and at this Cummings declared he was very apt, and prophesied that he would soon be holding a punch. This happened much sooner than even the sanguine conductor had anticipated, for on an afternoon trip one day Cummings missed his footing in springing on the train at Elizabeth, and falling on the platform turned his foot in such a manner that he was not able to stand on it.

Rob and the baggage master helped him to the baggage car, where a rough couch was made for him on top of a couple of trunks, and a doctor, who happened to be among the passengers, called to look after him.

"You'll have to take my place, Marston," he said, "till we get to Chelsea at any rate. Do you think you can manage it all right by yourself?"

"Oh, yes," answered Rob, as he took the punch the other handed to him, with a flush of pleasure mounting to his cheeks.

Then he started through the train, little imagining that this incident was to afford an opening for an experience which was to influence all his after-life.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AN ADVENTURE ON NO. 55.

We doubt if the President of the United States felt any deeper sense of self-importance on walking up to take possession of the White House than did Robert Marston when he started through the train that afternoon to collect the tickets. He understood pretty thoroughly just what he had to do, and reached the next to the last car without any trouble.

Many of the commuters greeted him pleasantly with such remarks as "Hello, they've got you behind the punch this time, have they?" but in the third car he ran against a snag.

It will be understood that Rob had been obliged to ask everybody to show his ticket, whether he had got on at the last stop or not. He had not been with Cummings on his rounds and therefore could not be expected to tell those who had come through from Jersey City from those who had boarded the train at Elizabeth. News of the accident to the conductor had spread among the passengers, so they all cheerfully

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put themselves to the trouble of getting out their tickets again for the young brakeman's inspection. All but one individual in the third car.

He was a man of about forty, with a red face and a scraggly beard, and was either asleep or pretending to be when Rob reached him.

"Ticket, if you please," said Rob, laying a hand lightly on his shoulder.

"Um, what's that?" muttered the fellow, lifting his head and favoring the young brakeman with a particularly surly stare.

"I want to see your ticket, if you please," repeated Rob.

"Just showed it a while ago," growled the other.

"Yes, but the conductor can't come through now, and I must see them all this time."

"Can't help that. You don't want to punch it, do you?"

"Not unless you got on at Elizabeth."

"Well, I didn't, so that's all you want to know."

"I must see your ticket, though," persisted Rob.

"That's equivalent to saying you don't believe my word," blustered the other, throwing himself back in the seat and swelling out a much rumpled shirt front.

"I'm only obeying rules," rejoined Rob, as quietly as he could.

"Never heard of a rule that made a passenger show his ticket between every station," and the fellow turned himself in his seat with his back toward Rob and made as if to resume his nap.

"I must see that ticket," and Rob spoke with great firmness.

By this time there was considerable stir among the passengers in the immediate neighborhood. Just behind the surly individual sat a young fellow whom Rob had often noticed. He was about his own age and a commuter to Midway Junction. He had a very pleasant face, and from his dress Rob judged that he must be a member of some aristocratic family, who were still at their country place at Midway. After the first week he had nodded to the young brakeman as he passed him in the car, and now seemed to take a lively interest in the controversy in the seat ahead of him.

Presently he beckoned to Rob, who stepped back while the other whispered to him: "He *did* get on at Elizabeth. I saw him. He's trying to beat his way. You can tell him you've got a witness if you like. I'll back you up."

"Much obliged," returned Rob, gratefully. "I don't want to get you into trouble, though."

"Don't stop for that. I shall rather enjoy the fun,"

and the fellow placed himself on the edge of his seat as if ready to bounce up and take a hand at a moment's notice.

"Are you going to show me that ticket?" Rob began, again stepping in beside his man.

"I told you once I wasn't going to show it," was the reply. "It's an imposition to keep a man fishing in his pocket for a bit of pasteboard every five minutes."

"And you say you have ridden from Jersey City?" Rob persisted.

"That's what I said," was the snappish rejoinder.

"I beg your pardon, but I have reason to believe that you got on at Elizabeth."

Rob spoke quietly and waited for the effect.

"Young man, this is an insult," fairly roared the other. "The company shall know of this. I—I shall report you as soon as we reach Philadelphia."

"And call on me for a witness, will you?" interposed the young fellow from behind.

The man turned quickly, his face lighting up with malevolent satisfaction at finding a backer, as he supposed.

"I can bear testimony to the fact," went on the young man, with a twinkle in his eye which only Rob saw, "that you got on the train at Elizabeth."

The would-be beater of his way looked as if he had been slapped in the face. He had expected something so altogether different.

"You must be mistaken, sir," he stammered. "I came from New York; crossed in the ferryboat New Jersey. I rode in the smoking car till I reached Elizabeth, where I got out to send a telegram. Then I came in here."

"In that case," rejoined the stranger from Midway Junction, "you of course have a ticket from New York, which you can have no objection to showing me."

"Sir," exclaimed the other, rising to his feet and drawing himself up proudly, "I am a gentleman, and as such am not accustomed to being called upon to substantiate my word with proofs."

"Then you refuse to show me your ticket as well as decline to let an official of the road look at it?" persisted the young man.

"When the proper official presents himself, I shall be willing to comply with the rules," was the response, uttered with a poor assumption of dignity. "Look at the fellow's cap. See the word 'Brakeman' there? He has nothing to do with the tickets."

"He has authority to put you off the train, though, if you refuse to show yours," put in Rob, whose blood was up to the boiling point.

He felt that in dealing with this case he would either show the company that he was deserving of the trust that had been reposed in him, or the reverse. It would be an easy matter to take the man's word and let the matter pass, saying nothing about it to Cummings, but this would be shirking his duty.

He reached up and gave the signal cord a single pull. Instantly three sharp whistles sounded from the engine and the wheels grated harshly on the rails as the train was brought to a standstill.

"Come," said Rob, unflinchingly, laying his hand on the troublesome passenger's shoulder.

"Hands off, you impertinent puppy," roared the other.

"You're the one that goes off—off this train," returned Rob, with slightly pale cheeks, but preserving a firm front.

The man, who was a six-footer, threw back his head and laughed.

CHAPTER XXV.

FRED DARNLEY.

"You must either show your ticket or get off the train."

Rob repeated the order in clear, distinct tones and did not retreat an inch when his troublesome passengers rose close beside him to his full six feet of height.

"And you're going to put me off, I suppose," he said, bestowing a contemptuous smile on the young brakeman, the top of whose cap would easily have come under his chin.

"I'm going to try my best to do it," responded Rob.

"And I'll back him," broke in the young fellow from the seat behind.

"So will I." "And I," added several other commuters, as they left their places and crowded up about the two central figures in this little drama that was being enacted *en route*.

"Thank you, gentlemen," said Rob. Then turning once more to the six-footer, he went on: "Once more, will you step out quietly or show that ticket?"

For reply the fellow put his hand in his vest pocket, took out a dollar and handed it to the young brakeman with this single remark:

“Elizabeth to Chelsea.”

Rob gave him his change and the slip redeemable for ten cents and then continued on his collecting trip, while the would-be beater of his way hastily betook himself forward to the smoking car. And this was the incident that led to the forming of the singular friendship that sprang up between Rob Marston and the fellow from Midway Junction.

“Bravo, that was neat,” he whispered when Rob came to him for his ticket. “You stuck to him like a leech.”

“And he might have wiped the floor with me like a mop,” laughed Rob, “if you gentlemen hadn’t backed me up so kindly.”

As he spoke, Rob was punching the monthly ticket and reading the name written across it, which he now learned for the first time: Frederick J. Darnley.

“I don’t know about that,” returned Darnley, taking in Rob’s well-knit, athletic figure. “I think he’d have found that a little fellow who’s a quick mover is a good deal of a match for an awkward giant.”

After that day this solitary commuter from Midway rode in the last car, where he would have an oppor-

tunity to chat with our young flagman when the latter was not occupied with his duties, and as there was a long run without a stop between Elizabeth and Brunswick, there was opportunity for the two to become pretty well acquainted.

Rob soon discovered that Darnley was in a banking house on Wall Street, and Darnley in turn speedily learned Rob's story. People tell a good many more things to while away the time when traveling than they would be apt to do under other circumstances.

"I believe I shouldn't mind being a passenger brakeman myself," Darnley remarked one afternoon. "Your father wasn't a railway man, was he?" he added on one of these occasions.

Rob's face grew suddenly grave. He had told Darnley that he was not own brother to the Marstons whose names he bore, but had revealed nothing further in regard to his parentage.

"I don't know," he was now obliged to reply. Then he added in a lower tone, "The fact is, I don't know who my father was."

The other started slightly and just then Rob chanced to look in the mirror that was set in the car just opposite them and in which the faces of himself and companion were reflected.

"Why, we look somewhat alike."

The thought came into his mind with the suddenness of lightning's flash. There was certainly a resemblance between the two. The hair, eyes, and complexion were all of the same tint, bordering on the blond, while the other features of the face were similar. Rob wondered if his companion had noticed the fact. As to himself, he was not yet certain whether the odd discovery caused him pleasure or annoyance.

"At any rate," he told himself, "it isn't my place to speak about it."

"Have you always lived in Westford?" was Darnley's question after a silence such as had never before fallen between them.

"Yes, as long as I can remember."

"And before that?" went on the other. "Where were the Marstons living then?"

"In Kansas," answered Rob, and as he spoke the words, Darnley turned toward him, and it seemed to the young flagman as if he was about to grasp his hand, but just then Rob caught sight of the handcar house near Midway, which reminded him of the fact that it was time to call out, so he was forced to hurry away to his duties.

"Good night, Marston," called out Darnley, as he left the car. "I'll see you tomorrow."

And during all the interim Rob's mind was busy

with vague surmising. What was impending? Could it be possible that the veil surrounding the mystery of his birth was about to be lifted? Was he going to turn out to be the long-lost heir of some wealthy family, just as though he was a character in a story? And to think of Fred Darnley being his brother!

But Rob tried his best not to think of such a thing. He had been perfectly contented with his position and prospects, for he had reason to believe that his conduct on the day Conductor Cummings had sprained his ankle had come to the ears of the station-master in Philadelphia. Now, the incident of his resemblance to the young New Yorker and the latter's questions concerning his early life had fired him with ambitions in an entirely new direction. He saw a college career opening out before him, a luxurious house waiting for him, aye, perchance a father and mother whom he might call his very own.

All these aspirations which George Frame had dubbed "princely" and which, since his work on the railroad had begun, had drifted almost entirely out of Rob's mind, now returned with renewed persistency in spite of him, and kept him awake during the greater part of the night.

"What's the matter with you, Rob?" Archie Hyde wanted to know the next morning. "You've got a

look in your eyes as if you saw a wild engine rushing for an open switch where your train stands.”

Rob hardly knew what to answer, but managed to make some sort of reply that turned the matter into a joke, and for the rest of the day tried to pay strict attention to business and banish all thoughts of the Darnleys.

But when 5:40 came around and he stood calling out beside the last car of No. 55 his heart beat a great deal faster than usual as he watched for the appearance of the young fellow who looked so much like himself.

Starting time came, however, and Darnley had not arrived, and the train went off without him. Nor was he on board the next day, nor the one following.

CHAPTER XXVI.

DOES IT MEAN A CHANGE OF NAME?

As the days went by and no Darnley appeared on No. 55, Rob's mind began to resume its normal bent. Gradually his unrest subsided, and he was in a fair way to become entirely absorbed in his railroad life again, when, at the end of a week, something occurred that set all his hopes a-blazing again.

It was on a Tuesday morning, and he was passing the station-master's room on his way to the trainmen's quarters to don his uniform when he chanced to meet Mr. Cutler.

"Oh, that reminds me, Marston," exclaimed the latter. "A letter came here for you yesterday. You'll find it inside on my desk."

"Who can be writing to me here?" thought Rob, for Sadie and Dick always addressed him at the Gad-dises'.

And yet he was not greatly surprised when he picked up the envelope to find in the corner the words, "Merwyn, Darnley & Co., Bankers, Wall Street, corner of Broad, New York,"

He tore it open hastily and read as follows :

"MY DEAR MARSTON—We have moved back to town sooner than I had expected. I want to see you about a very important matter. I believe you have several hours in Jersey City during the middle of the day, so I should be very glad to have you come over to New York on Tuesday, meet me at the office here at one o'clock, and go with me to lunch.

"Hoping that you can come, I remain,

Very truly yours,

FREDERICK J. DARNLEY."

"I must take my suit with me," was Rob's first thought, without giving himself an opportunity to speculate on the nature of the very important matter on which Fred Darnley wished to talk with him.

It is often that way. In moments of deepest crises we not infrequently find our minds burdening themselves with details that are mere trifles in comparison. However, our hero had all of three hours during his run eastward in which to turn the affair over in all its bearings, and it was fortunate for his peace of mind that Archie Hyde did not run with him that day.

Arrived in Jersey City, he took his citizen's suit—a new one he had recently bought—up into the train-men's room and exchanged his uniform for it. Then came the hardest part of all—waiting till it was time to cross the river and keep his appointment with Darnley.

He decided to divide the time between Jersey City and New York, and when he reached the latter city, set out to reach his destination by means of a leisurely stroll down the water front to the Battery. But so eager was he that his stroll soon transformed itself into a rapid walk, and when he reached Wall Street the clock on old Trinity pointed to but half-past twelve.

He turned into the graveyard, and wandered about among the moss-grown tombs, his ears filled with the roar of the elevated trains, the tinkle of street-car bells, and the rumble of vehicles on the street, while his eyes seemed to see no one thing clearly—appeared to be fastened in some mysterious fashion upon his future, which he felt might be so dependent on the outcome of the next hour's interview. But the historic old graveyard *did* exert some influence, and by the end of twenty minutes he was enabled to leave the place in a quieter mood, prepared, he hoped, for whatever might be forthcoming.

He had no trouble in finding the offices of Merwyn, Darnley & Co., which were very handsomely fitted up; and, on entering, the first face he saw was Fred Darnley's.

"So my letter found you, did it?" he said, putting out his hand. "Was awfully afraid it wouldn't. Hold

on a **second** till I put on my coat, and I'll be out there with you."

Raised in the country as he had been, Rob could not help but be impressed by his present surroundings; but if he was somewhat awed by the appointments of the bank, he was fairly dazzled by the splendors of the restaurant to which Darnley carried him off, and which was one of the most famous at which New York's Wall Street magnates refresh the inner man during their noontime rest from money-making.

But not a sign that all this was new to him did Rob suffer to escape him. Indeed, he was conscious of the fact that Darnley was watching him pretty closely. What a lunch that was, though! It seemed a pity almost that very speedily the young flagman became so deeply absorbed in the conversation that he could not appreciate it as highly as if there had been nothing to distract his attention.

It was after the soup had been brought on that Darnley began with:

"I suppose you have been wondering why I asked you some questions the other night. I want to explain now. You won't mind, I hope, if it all turns out to mean nothing. Of course, this is something we can only be sure of by talking it over. I want to say this first, and have it clearly understood. Now, then, have you ever thought that you and I look alike?"

"Yes, it struck me that there was some resemblance that last day we were talking together, when I happened to catch sight of both our faces in the glass."

"And did anything else strike you at the same time?" went on Darnley, bending across the table to look steadily into his companion's eyes. Then he added, hastily: "But no, I will not ask you that; will say first myself that before I was born our family lived in the West, in Kansas. I had an elder brother then, but when he was very young, a mere infant, a tornado struck the town and leveled a big slice of it. Our house was scattered with a good many others, but strangely enough not one of us was hurt, only my elder brother Frank was missing. There were plenty of other people, little and big, missing too, so, although every effort was made, no trace of him was ever discovered. And now of course you can see what all this means. I think—"

Darnley paused, and Rob finished the sentence with:

"That I *may* be your brother Frank on account of the resemblance between us."

"I do, and have talked over the matter at home with my mother and sisters. Of course, this is a matter in which nothing can be done hastily. You told me that the people who adopted you came from Kansas, and the fact that you were not sure of your own parentage,

coupled with your likeness to me, seemed to point to but one thing. And yet, of course, these are not absolute proofs. It seems, too, as if these would be pretty difficult to obtain. There were no 'strawberry marks' or anything of that sort on Frank, mother says, by which you might be identified."

"And I'm afraid I can't help you any from my side," returned Rob. "You know Mrs. Marston died just as she was about to tell how they came by me."

"And have you never been able to find any papers or letters among Mr. or Mrs. Marston's effects that would throw light on the matter?"

"None that I know of. You know the old place has been torn down."

"Then I tell you what," exclaimed Darnley. "We'll have you up at the house and see what a mother's instinct will do."

CHAPTER XXVII.

PRESTO, CHANGE!

"On your left for Elizabeth, Brunswick, Chelsea, and Philadelphia!"

These were the words Rob was calling out that same afternoon at ten minutes to five as he stood beside his rear car in the Jersey City station; but if it had been his thoughts to which he had given expression they would have sounded like this: "I wonder if this is the last time I shall have to do this? What will Dick and Sadie say? What will be Mrs. Darnley's verdict and how shall I act if she says yes?"

For before he had left Fred it had been arranged that he should get the next day off, and after his morning trip join young Darnley at the office and go up to the house in Fifty-seventh Street with him, there to meet Mrs. Darnley. This was an ordeal from which he shrank, rather than a pleasure to which he eagerly looked forward, for that this submitting of himself to inspection would be otherwise than embarrassing, he could not expect. At the same time, the possibili-

ties were so great that time seemed to go by on leaden feet, pending the arrival of the crucial hour.

As he had never yet asked for leave of absence, he found little difficulty in having his request granted on the present occasion.

"But small use the holiday will be to me," he told himself, "in case I turn out not to be Frank Darnley after all."

Fred seemed to be as much excited over the thing as himself when they met the next day, and during the ride up town in the elevated conversation flagged sadly.

Rob was prepared to find the home that might turn out to be his a very handsome one, but he had not expected quite so much luxurious elegance, coupled with solid comfort, as burst upon his view when Fred opened the heavy doors of the Fifty-seventh Street mansion.

"Just come right up stairs with me to the library," said Darnley. "Mother's there, I guess. We'll walk in on her and have the thing over with. That's the best way. There's no use in prolonging the agony."

Up the heavily carpeted stairs, through a hallway lighted with softened rays from a cathedral glass skylight, and into an apartment lined with books, except where engravings and busts of authors broke the monotony of the walls, and then—

"Yes, it is Frank. I want no other proof."

Some one in a black gown had come forward and clasped Rob by both hands and the voice that spoke the words was the sweetest the boy had ever heard, for something within him told him it must be his mother's.

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Well, it was over and Rob—or Frank, as we must now call him—felt that he ought to be the happiest fellow on earth even if he was no longer a brakeman on the P. C. R. And yet there were some drawbacks connected with this entrance upon a new life.

In the first place, he had immediately before him the prospect of being introduced to his own sisters—two girls of sixteen and twelve, respectively. Then there would be the awkwardness of explaining to friends the whole story, to account for the presence of a new member of the family. The whole thing had come about so suddenly.

"Pshaw, old fellow, what do you care? Think how much better off you are than if you had been brought up a clodhopper all these years, and then had to be subjected to a polishing process! Jove, when I think of what you might have turned out to be, I'm everlastingly glad that I did not know there was any possibility of that long-lost brother of mine turning up.

I'd have been in a constant state of terror lest he might turn out to be a chap with a striped suit or one with a big checked one and a mania for the race track."

This speech of Fred's went a great way toward making things easier for Frank, and when he met the girls and found them both to be as open-hearted and unspoiled as their brother, he began to feel more at home in the big house. They were both pretty, but Grace, the elder, was a veritable beauty, and so lively and unaffected that she won a big place in Frank's heart at once.

And yet, in spite of all this good will, there were periods during that luncheon, at which a butler and a footman served, when conversation flagged sadly, for people who had just met could not be expected to find unlimited topics to talk about, even if they were such close relatives.

After the meal a long consultation was held by Mrs. Darnley, Fred, and Frank over the latter's future.

"Of course, you will leave the railroad at once," said the former. "And to save you any embarrassment about the matter I will myself write a note to Mr. Gately, the president, explaining things. Then comes your choice of college or business."

Frank chose college, a choice which met with great favor, as he could not fail to see.

"And now, my dear fellow, you must come off to my tailor's with me," proposed Fred, when this point had been settled, and Columbia selected as the college.

So two hours were spent in selecting cloths and being measured, and they got back to the house just as a handsome T cart was brought up to the door. A drive through Central Park with Fred and the two girls served to strengthen the acquaintanceship and furnish topics of mutual interest for conversation.

The rest of the family having an engagement for the evening, Frank passed the time in a quiet talk over his past life with Mrs. Darnley, and at ten o'clock he went to bed, and was greatly surprised to find that he was able to sleep.

And this is how Rob Marston became Frank Darnley, the young flagman was transformed into the Columbia College freshman, and the country boy developed into a city young man of great expectations. Most readily he fell into the new ways, and after a month the old life seemed like a dream.

And so he drifted on to the next milestone in his career, which was to be as great a surprise to him, although by no means as pleasant a one, as the last had been.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A PICTURE IN AN ALBUM.

By Christmas Frank Darnley had become thoroughly at home in the new sphere in which his lot had been cast, and the readiness with which he acquired manners and customs foreign to those to which he had been brought up was a further convincing proof, if any such were needed, that a mother's instinct had not erred. He had written at once to Dick and Sadie, apprising them of the wonderful occurrence, and their replies, full of warmest congratulation, contained nothing to show that any mistake had been made.

As the Darnleys had lived in New York but half a dozen years, their circle of acquaintances simply took it for granted that Frank had been off somewhere to school, when they found a new "young Mr. Darnley" in the handsome Fifty-seventh Street mansion. And for the rest, Frank speedily became a favorite on his own account.

Once only during this interval did a reminder of the past crop out to emphasize the contrast between

that period and the present. He had gone with a party to the Horse Show, and was talking animatingly with Miss Beatrice Van Masten, the young lady who had been his neighbor at dinner. They had halted for a moment where the crowd was thickest, before proceeding to their seat in a box, and were endeavoring to catch a glimpse of the Shetland ponies over which those in front were uttering "Ohs" and "Ahs" of admiration. Suddenly Frank felt himself clutched by the sleeve of his dress coat, while a voice with a twang in it exclaimed: "Well, I do declare, if here ain't that young man that got into all that trouble on my account. I'm right down glad ter see you. Here, Ephraim, hand me two dollars. It's been on my mind all these weeks that I never gave him nothin' for his services."

It was Mrs. Opdyke, and she had turned from Frank to a weather-beaten old man by her side, who, very reluctantly, unbuttoned his coat preparatory to taking out his pocketbook. He need not have worried, for Frank, noticing that his companion had been so absorbed in striving to obtain a view of the ponies that she had not seen the lady from Connecticut, took advantage of an opening in the crowd, and, giving his arm to Miss Van Masten, pushed his way with all speed out of the Opdyke vicinity.

"I hope I didn't hurt the old lady's feelings," he said to himself, "but really I wouldn't like to have had to explain to Miss Van Masten how I had once been arrested on a charge of stealing several thousand dollars."

That night, after the evening's entertainment at the Garden and a supper at Delmonico's, he asked himself, as he was preparing for bed: "Am I ashamed of my past life? Have I become a snob, or was it really only the accusation of theft that I did not want exposed?"

He thought the whole thing over carefully, imagined various situations in which he might be placed, and at last was enabled to fall asleep peacefully with the conviction that his past was not one to be ashamed of.

"And I'll ask mother about inviting George Frame in to spend some Sunday with me " he added to himself.

But the Christmas holidays intervened before he could bring this about—a holiday season that was to be the most memorable one within his recollection.

It was the custom of the family to pass New Year's at their country house in Midway, inviting a large party of friends to spend it there with them. They all went out in the 4:40 train the afternoon before, and Frank's emotions were strange ones as he walked through the well-known station at Jersey City.

"I wonder who's flagman on 55 now?" he asked himself, and at that instant he heard a familiar voice calling out: "Elizabeth, Brunswick, Chelsea, and Philadelphia!"

It was Archie Hyde, and "Hello, Archie!" cried Frank, stepping up to him at once and extending his hand.

"Why, Bob Marston, how are you!" exclaimed Hyde, staring in considerable amazement at Frank, who looked very well in the costly winter garments with which Fred's tailor had provided him.

"Well, no, it isn't Bob Marston," responded Frank, with a laugh. "But I'll see you on the train and explain later."

Which he did, much to Archie's amazement and delight.

"And has anything been heard of Webb Hillman?" Frank asked, as he concluded his chat with Hyde.

"Not a word," was the reply. "I'm afraid he's gone completely to the bad. And how do you like being one of the nobs?"

"Well, I haven't had anything to complain of as yet," and with the words and another warm pressure of the hand, Frank went back to his friends, who were in the forward car.

Midway was reached shortly after six, and Frank

pinched himself to make sure he was not dreaming as he stepped into the carriage which he had often noticed in waiting at the station for Fred. He was naturally very anxious to see the place, which, when they entered it presently through the heavy stone gateway, far surpassed all the expectations he had formed of it.

Servants had been sent on ahead, so the house was all warmed and lighted, and a merry party it was that sat down to the bountifully spread supper-table. The old year was to be danced out on the waxed floors of the great drawing-rooms.

Dancing began at half-past nine and merrily the last hours of the dying year were whirled away. It was quarter of twelve when Frank and his partner, who just then happened to be Miss Van Masten, tired out for the moment, retired to a cozy corner of the bay window between the two drawing-rooms to rest a while and have a quiet chat. It was unseasonably warm, and through one of the open windows presently came the tones of a locomotive whistle.

Somehow the sound recalled vividly to Frank that night when he had found Webb Hillman on the track, and so abstracted did he become that his companion addressed him twice before he heard.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "what was it you remarked?"

"Oh, simply that this was such a lovely home. And

it seems so pleasant to be able to keep up two houses in this way. Why, with servants in both places one doesn't even have to put the books away. They are sure to be kept dusted," and as she spoke, Miss Van Masten reached out her hand and picked up a photograph album from a small table that stood in the bay window.

She began turning the leaves mechanically, with Frank looking over her shoulder.

"But of course you can't judge of the place properly at this season of the year," he said. "Summer is the time—is the time—"

He repeated the words and then came to a full stop. The girl turned quickly and exclaimed, half springing up: "Oh, Mr. Darnley, you are ill! What is it? What has happened?"

For Frank had turned deadly pale and sat there like a statue, his eyes riveted on the photograph of a small child on one of the open pages of the album.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A NEW YEAR'S DAY THAT WAS NOT A HAPPY ONE.

"Oh, I'm all right. I beg your pardon again. What were you saying?"

Frank pulled himself together and stammered out the words, at the same time turning over the page of the album containing the picture which had so startled him.

"I wasn't saying anything. It was you who were talking," responded Miss Van Masten, looking at him curiously.

"Well, I've forgotten what it was now. Come, there's your favorite 'Santiago.' Shall we dance?"

"With pleasure," and the next minute the two were in the midst of the other waltzers.

And while Frank's feet kept time to the music, his thoughts kept up an equally measured beat to the refrain: "The same picture of Hillman when he was a little fellow I saw at his aunt's house in Red Ball. How did it come to be here? There can be only one reason for it. He's the real Frank Darnley and I've got his place!"

Before the dance was over Fred came up and claimed Miss Van Masten to finish it with him, and Frank hurriedly left the parlor, and snatching up his hat, escaped into the outer air to think the matter over calmly.

At first he tried to assure himself that he had been needlessly disturbed.

"What does it prove," he asked himself, "that I see Hillman's picture in a Darnley album? Nobody has told me yet who it is. It may be that his parents were friends or relatives of the family. I'll ask Eleanor or Fred the first chance I get," and with this determination he returned to the drawing-room, just in time to join the supper party.

The night's festivities were to be wound up with a Virginia Reel, and in this Frank's place was next to Fred, and in the moving up they were brought close to the bay window.

"I say, Fred," asked Frank, picking up the album while they were awaiting their time to be swung by the couple coming down the center, "who's this?" and he pointed to the picture that had so startled him.

"Why, you ought to know that, old man," exclaimed Fred. "It's yourself, Frank."

Just then Eleanor reached out her hand for Frank to take, so that the involuntary exclamation that

escaped his lips was lost to Fred, and while the latter was being turned Frank had a chance to recover himself in some degree.

Yes, there could no longer be any doubt. Webb Hillman was the real Frank Darnley, while he himself was an impostor.

And all the while the merry dance went on, with its jig-like music, gay laughter, and hand-slapping, and poor Frank was compelled to wear the mask of mirth, feeling inwardly like a skeleton at the feast.

"When shall I tell them?" he asked himself, and then came the temptation: "Why tell them at all? They will never know. Besides, Hillman may never be found, and if he is, with his habits, he can only be a disgrace to all the good people here."

So he reasoned, while they were all separating to their rooms, and then, as he bade Fred good night and closed the door, he covered his face with his hands, and started back as though he wanted to get away from himself.

"Oh, no, no, I could never do that," he cried under his breath. "Has this brief taste of wealth made me into such a vile thing as that? No, no, I will go out and seek Webb myself. Who knows but the news I bring will be the very thing that will make a man of him?" And with this resolve our young flagman began the new year.

"When shall I tell them?" was Frank's (as we shall still continue to call him) waking thought the next morning.

Not that day, surely, set apart for the entertainment of their guests. And yet Frank wished it could be over. Every instant now that he filled the place which he was convinced did not belong to him weighed upon his mind like lead. Many of the friends were to depart that afternoon and "I'll tell Mrs. Darnley then," Frank determined. "We can drive over to Red Ball and perhaps find out from Hillman's aunt where he is. Then when I find him, I can go back on the road."

"What's the matter with you today, old fellow?" Fred wanted to know during the morning. "You don't seem a bit like yourself."

It was on the tip of Frank's tongue to reply, "Oh, yes, yes, that's just the trouble. I've found out that I *am* myself, Rob Marston!" but he turned it off by declaring that he had a headache, which was true enough, and added that he hoped the horseback ride they were to take in the afternoon would do him good.

This ride presented him with an unlooked for opportunity. Five of the young people started on it: Fred and Miss Van Masten, Frank, Eleanor and Bess. Their course led them through Westford, where Frank

saw the great structure that was going up on the site of the old farmhouse, and then Fred struck out in the direction of Red Ball.

"If I could only stop and see 'Aunt Priscilla' now!" thought Frank. "It would be so much better if I were able to tell Mrs. Darnley something definite about Hillman!"

He felt, therefore, that he was in luck when his horse struck a stone with his forefeet and loosened a shoe, just before they reached Red Ball.

"I'll have to stop for a few minutes at the blacksmith's shop," he called out to Fred. "Don't you people wait for me. We're not very far from—"

He was going to add "home," but the word stuck in his throat, and reaching the turn to the smithy just then, he started up Hero and hurried off.

Not till he drew rein in front of the closed shop did he recollect that it was New Year's Day and that, of course, the blacksmith would not expect to work. Alighting, he managed to pull off the loosened shoe himself, and then, leading Hero by the bridle, he walked off toward the little house among the trees, which was close at hand.

Tying his horse to a maple in front of the gate, Frank walked up to the little porch and knocked. The old lady herself opened the door, and Frank saw at once that she did not remember him.

"I called to inquire about your nephew, Webb Hillman," he began. "Can you tell me where I can find him?"

"Come in, come in and sit down," returned the old lady, her face lighting up at mention of Hillman's name, and Frank followed her into the little parlor where that same picture stared at him from the wall.

It gave him an odd sensation to reflect that had he not met that buggy that Sunday afternoon he would in all probability never have laid eyes on the portrait and would consequently not have been in the least startled by the sight of that smaller picture in the Darnley album. In that case he would have gone on being Frank Darnley to the end of the chapter.

"And imposing, although unconsciously, on those good people, all the while," he added to himself.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE ROAD TO HAPPINESS.

"And who may you be who wants to know about Webb?" began the old lady, when they were seated in the little parlor.

"Why, don't you remember me?" answered Frank, "Rob Marston, who took tea with you and your nephew one Sunday night?"

And the old lady began to cry.

"I hope you will excuse me, young man," Mrs. Hillman said presently, when she succeeded in controlling her emotions sufficiently to speak, "but I haven't seen my boy since that day you were with him. I—I suspected the truth then. And now I know it. Tell me when you saw him last, and please don't keep anything back."

Feeling that perfect frankness would indeed be the best for all concerned, Frank related how he had found Hillman on the track that night and detailed the conversation that had subsequently taken place between them.

"And then he didn't come back here?" he added.

"No, nor wrote a line. He always told me that no news was good news; but for the past few weeks I have found it hard, very hard, to believe it, and now what you tell me shows—shows—" and once again the poor lady gave way to her tears.

Even in the midst of his own trouble the thought occurred to Frank: "What a temperance lesson is this!" For the mere gratification of the sense of taste in one, days and weeks and months of sorrow are brought upon another.

"Don't grieve so," he said. "Listen to what I have to tell you. I have reason to believe that your nephew is the son of a wealthy New York family, whom I know very well and to whom I can restore him."

On hearing this the old lady's surprise was so great that she forgot her sorrow, and raised her head, gazing straight at Frank with wide-open, staring eyes.

"Are you sure of this? Have you proof?" she asked.

"I am pretty sure of it, but the proofs I want from you. You can tell me, of course, where Webb was born?"

"No, I cannot," was the astonishing reply. "Nor does he know himself. I am not his aunt, except by adoption, although he does not know that. I took

him from an orphan asylum when he was only two, and oh! what a comfort he was to me in his boyhood."

"Where was this asylum?" asked Frank eagerly. "In the West?"

"No, in New York. It has been burned down since."

"And did you never try to find out who were his parents?"

"No; they told me that they were both dead, and so I did not care to make any further inquiries. You see, I wanted to keep him all to myself. But why do you think you have discovered his parents?"

"Because I saw a photograph like that picture in the family album over at the Darnleys' country house at Midway," replied Frank, pointing to the crayon sketch on the wall.

"The Darnleys!" exclaimed the old lady. "Impossible! They are the richest family anywhere around. What should my Webb have to do with them? That picture was made by my sister years ago. This other one, you say, was a photograph?"

"Yes, and the living image of the one hanging there. Can you give me the address of that New York asylum?"

"What do you want it for? To find somebody that belonged there and get proofs that will remove the last hope I have of my boy ever coming back to me?"

"Why, what do you mean?" exclaimed Frank.

"Only this. Now, in spite of Webb's long absence, I can still hope. Every night leave a lamp burning and the door unlocked, thinking he may come back. The poorer, the lower down he gets, the more need he will have of my forgiving care and compassion. But if you find a fine home for him, advertise for him to come and take possession, it will be his duty to go. The temptations of his new life will harm him more than its privileges will help him. This is selfish in me, I know, but it will be best for Webb in the end. And yet it seems wrong for me—" Here the poor lady broke down completely, and sobbed aloud.

Poor Frank! He felt as though there were two forces at work, striving to pull him asunder. Here was Mrs. Hillman pleading with him not to give up his name and station on the one hand, and his own conscience on the other calling upon him to renounce both.

What ought he to do? Even to the Darnleys the revelation he had to make he felt sure would bring sorrow and chagrin. Why, then, must he make it?

All he had to do was to keep silent, and himself, the Darnleys, and poor old Mrs. Hillman, with her lamp always burning and the latch string out—all would be content. Was it possible that he must do his struggling all over again?

What if he should tell all to Mrs. Hillman? Per-

haps she could advise him? But no, he reflected, she was an interested party herself. There seemed to be no one he could turn to—yes, there were two—Sadie and Dick, the companions of his childhood, and with the thought of them a wave of homesickness for the old life on the Marston farm swept over Frank.

“I will go out to Chicago and consult with them,” he determined, and then, as he pictured himself putting the question to Sadie: “Shall I be honest and miserable, or live out a falsehood and be—” the whole question was answered finally for him. He could not add the word “happy” to the alternative. His mind was made up.

CHAPTER XXXI.

AN EXASPERATING MISCHANCE.

"I must go now, Mrs. Hillman," said Frank, rising. "It may be that I am wrong about Webb and the Darnleys. What you have told me, I must acknowledge, does not tend to confirm my suspicions, but I am sure, now that you have had an opportunity to think it over, you will not try to keep me from finding out all I can about your nephew's birth."

"No, no, I will not. I was weak. You are a good boy. Here, I have got the name of the society that owned the asylum I spoke of. Perhaps you can find out where they are located now. And you will let me know all that you find out? Are you on the railroad now?"

"No, not at present," answered Frank, evasively, and after securing the address he wanted and promising to write as soon as he had any news, he hurried away.

"I won't say anything to the Darnleys till after I see the asylum people," he determined with himself.

Therefore he tried to forget for the time the discovery he had made, and sought to enter into the enjoyments of the evening with his usual zest. It was hard, though, to have plans proposed to him for the coming season of city gaieties preceding Lent.

"Look here, Fred," he presently found an opportunity to say, "I've got to go to Chicago as soon as I can and during my holiday."

"Why, hello, what's up, old fellow?" Fred wanted to know. "This is a mighty sudden move on your part, isn't it?"

"Yes, rather, but then I want to see Sadie and Dick on a little matter of business, and this is the best time to go, during the Columbia vacation."

"Well, I suppose it is, but I'm sorry you'll miss so many of the jolly good larks we've arranged for."

Frank decided to start on the Limited the next night, and telegraphed to Dick that he was coming. He went to New York early on the morning of the 2d, found, after considerable trouble, the present address of the man who had been superintendent of the asylum from which Hillman had been taken, hurried to his home in Bank Street, and sent up his card with an urgent request for an interview.

How much depended on this, Frank's wildly throbbing heart amply attested,

Mr. Chusdie—that was the name of the superintendent of the asylum—proved to be a very old gentleman, with a long white beard and rather hard of hearing. Frank had considerable trouble in making him understand what he wanted, and when this was accomplished the man was unable to remember anything about the antecedents of the orphans that had been under his care.

“But there is a book up stairs somewhere in the garret,” he said. “May be that will tell. I’ll get my granddaughter to look for it if you don’t mind waiting a bit.”

Frank signified his willingness to prolong his call for any reasonable time, whereupon the old gentleman hobbled out into the hall and called up the stairs, “Amy, Amy!” and then Frank heard a soft voice saying, “Yes, grandpa, I’m coming!” and after that he waited and waited, counting the number of roses in a row on the wall paper, between the fireplace and the window, and then between the floor and the ceiling, and was just starting in to reckon up the number of rows when old Mr. Chusdie made his re-appearance with a dusty volume in his arms. This he spread out on a desk between the windows, and seating himself on a chair at one side, motioned for Frank to take his place in front.

"Now," said the old man, "reckon what year it was you think the boy was taken away, and maybe you can find something about him."

After a considerable search Frank found that for which he was looking—the name Priscilla Hillman—and opposite it several closely written lines, in which the word "boy" occurred several times.

"Here it is," he exclaimed, with an excitement that he could not suppress.

The old gentleman leaned forward to look, and in so doing the wide sleeve of the dressing-gown he wore caught in an inkstand on the desk, overturned it, and sent the contents in a flood over the page of the book, utterly blotting out the all-important entry.

Frank sprang to his feet to escape the inky down-pour, and the old gentleman rushed to the door with the cry, "Amy, oh Amy! Quick with a cloth! I've upset the ink and it's all running on the carpet."

The room was soon a scene of confusion, for Amy, Amy's mother, the housemaid, and the cook all came rushing in, while the old gentleman, suddenly bethinking himself of a means of removing ink-stains he had heard of somewhere, sent the latter off at double quick to the kitchen for a pan of milk, and on receiving it dashed the contents on the floor in a mass to the consternation of Amy and her mother, on whose dresses the milk splashed up freely.

"Was there ever anything more exasperating?" muttered Frank, standing off at one side. "We'll never be able to read that now, so I might as well go. Good-by, Mr. Chusdie," he called out, and then, not noting whether the old gentleman heard him or not, he hurried off.

"Now, Sadie and Dick are all I have to fall back on," he told himself. "They may be able to tell me something that will throw a little more light on my side of the mystery."

That night he left for Chicago, and arrived the following evening. He had telegraphed that he was coming, and such a reception as he received! He found the brother and sister snugly settled in a little apartment over their store, and every indication that trade was prospering.

After supper, "Come, Rob," began Dick, and then added, with a laugh, "I declare, I'll never get used to dropping the old name."

"Perhaps you needn't have to," interposed Frank, as Dick was about to go on.

"Why, what do you mean?" exclaimed Dick and Sadie in a breath.

Whereupon Frank told the whole story, even to Webb Hillman's failing and his mysterious disappearance. They listened intently, and when Rob had finished, "Well, lad," remarked Dick, "is that all?"

"Yes; why, don't you think it's enough to make me feel very uncomfortable, and as if I had been imposing on these Darnleys, who have been so good to me?"

"And it all hangs on the two pictures?" said Dick, reflectively, and without making a direct reply to his foster brother's question.

"Yes, and it seems to me that is enough to settle the whole business, don't you think so?" persisted Frank.

"It is only circumstantial evidence, though," rejoined Dick.

"But even at that, supposing you were in my place, Dick, you wouldn't feel easy till you had it clearly settled one way or the other."

"No, boy, I wouldn't," the other was compelled to admit.

"And can't you or Sadie throw any more light on my early history that will do something toward settling it?"

But both shook their heads. Already, when first informed of their foster brother's adoption by the Darnleys, they had furnished every scrap of information of which they stood possessed.

"I've half a mind to give the whole thing up as it stands and run no risks," muttered poor Frank, disconsolately. "I'm tired of not knowing who I am.

If I come out and say that I'll go back to being Rob Marston I'll be a good sight happier than I am this minute."

"But it wouldn't be right to do that, Rob," returned Dick. "You must remember that there are other people to be considered besides yourself. It's too bad that old man was so clumsy as to upset that ink-bottle."

"Yes, if it hadn't been for that the whole thing might have been settled by this time. There was a good deal written on the page, and it must have explained where the boy who was adopted came from. Of course, if it had said he had been brought to the asylum by his parents from some of the New England States, it would be pretty good proof that he wasn't Frank Darnley."

"And in that case," Sadie wanted to know, "how are we to explain the presence of the photograph in the Darnleys' album?"

"That's the only thing that makes me think what I would have seen in the asylum book would have proved conclusively that Hillman must be the fellow whose name I now bear. I don't see why I wouldn't be on the safe side to go back, lay everything before Mrs. Darnley, and give up this masquerading under a title that doesn't belong to me."

"What then would you give the Darnleys in your

place?" returned Dick. "The knowledge that for three months they had been lavishing affection and money on a fellow who turns out to be nothing to them after all; the conviction that he who is to take your place was last seen intoxicated, the uncertainty as to whether or not he will ever turn up again. No, no, Rob, you must investigate the thing to the end. I'll help you all I can. Now what do you want me to do?"

"Why, my dear fellow, I came out here to have you advise me. It seems to me I've done all I could, except go direct to the Darnleys and ask *them* what to do."

"No, don't do that. My advice is: Go to bed, sleep over the matter, and then start afresh in the morning."

This advice Frank proceeded to act upon, little dreaming what the morrow would bring.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE MAN AT THE GRIP.

In spite of the fatigue induced by his long journey, Frank did not sleep well that night. He only half dozed all through the long watches of it, and in dreams seemed to see Mrs. Opdyke's face looking at him reproachfully for his treatment of her that night at the Horse Show.

"I'm afraid I looked at the case too much from my side and not enough from hers," he told himself, and tossed from side to side in the vain endeavor to woo dreamless slumber. "Wonder if I can't do anything to smooth things over when I get back? I might get her address from that hotel register. I'll make a point of remembering to do it."

And after arriving at this commendable determination, he was enabled to obtain some rest.

It happened that both Sadie and Dick were busy the next morning, so Frank decided to divert himself till dinner-time by making a tour of inspection through the city, which was of course entirely new to him.

"You must see the site for the Exposition," Dick told him, and explained how to get there, so at ten o'clock Frank boarded a cable-car and was soon gliding swiftly along in the direction of the Lake Front.

So interested was he in the novelty of his surroundings that for the time being he forgot his troubles, and as other passengers left the car he moved toward the forward end, whence he could obtain a more extended view of the route they were traveling. In so doing he arrived finally at the seat next the front window.

It was a terribly cold morning and the wind, sweeping down from the Lake, struck the gripman full in the face. To be sure he was well wrapped up, with a muffler wound tightly around his throat, and heavy padded gloves on his hands. Nevertheless, he swayed from side to side, stamping first one foot, then the other, in the effort to keep up the circulation.

"I shouldn't care to be in his shoes," reflected Frank, and just then the car jostled over something on the track and the gripman instinctively turned his head as if to see what it was.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Frank, almost springing from his seat. "Webb Hillman!"

For it was he, although a beard now covered his chin, while his cheeks seemed sunken and his eyes had

lost that merry gleam which used to shine out of them.

"Hello, how do you do?"

Frank made motions with his lips to convey this greeting, while he looked about for some means of getting at Hillman, but all he found was the notice: "Passengers are requested not to converse with the man at the grip."

Whether or not Webb had recognized him he was unable to make out. At all events, the fellow had instantly faced about again and was sounding his gong with great vigor.

"I'm going to stick to this car till we get to the station, wherever it is," Frank resolved. "I can't talk to Hillman where he is, but I don't mean that he shall slip through my fingers."

So he remained where he was, utterly oblivious to any attractions that the site for the World's Fair might offer, paid another fare, and did not budge till the car arrived at the home terminus, where the "drum" was situated. Then, hurrying to the door, he alighted just as the momentum ceased, and rushed around to the front end with hand outstretched.

"Hello, Hillman," he cried. "How are you?"

"How do you do, Marston?" replied the other gravely, as he shook hands in almost solemn fashion. "I was hoping you wouldn't recognize me with this," and he touched his beard.

"Then you *did* recognize me?" said Frank.

"Yes; what are you doing here? But don't stand out in the cold. Come inside with me."

"Are you off now for a time?" asked Frank.

"Yes; an hour for dinner."

"Then come with me to a restaurant. Where's there a good one near? I've got lots to talk to you about."

With a good deal of reluctance, Hillman, who seemed strangely unlike his old self, finally agreed to this, and, explaining where they could find a lunch-room, went off with Frank.

"You asked me what I am doing out here," the latter began as they started out. "*You* had about as much to do with it as anybody; more, I guess, come to think it over."

"Me?" gasped Hillman. "Why, what could I possibly have to do with you?" Then, with more eagerness than he had yet exhibited, he added: "Did Cutler make it all right with you about that night you missed your train?"

"Oh, yes, thanks to you."

"But how is it you are here out West?"

Hillman's lips asked that question, and his eyes added, as they fell on Frank's fur-trimmed overcoat: "What sort of brakeman's pay do you get to go about rigged like this?"

"I'm not a railroad-man any longer," answered Frank.

"What are you in now?"

"Well, I'm at present a gentleman of leisure, enjoying the midwinter holiday which Columbia College allows its students."

"Columbia College!" fairly gasped the other.

And just then they reached the restaurant, and while Frank was picking out a table and ordering dinner, Hillman kept gazing at him steadily as if trying to anticipate by the aid of sight the revelation of the mystery which he hoped presently to hear.

"Yes, I wear the blue and white at present, instead of the dark blue," went on Frank, while they were waiting for the soup, adding significantly: "But it depends on you, Hillman, whether I continue to do so or not."

"Look here, Marston," now broke out his companion, "what do you mean by all this? Why should you come clear to Chicago to see me? Did you know I was here?"

"No, I didn't; I'll admit that much," was the answer.

"But that makes the whole thing darker than ever. If you didn't know I was here, and yet seeing me is going to—to have such an influence on your life, why—oh, I give it all up. Tell me all about it."

"There, you're more like your old self now. And speaking of your old self, can you tell me anything about your boyhood? Do you remember, for instance, when that picture that hangs in your aunt's parlor in Red Ball was done?"

A quick expression of pain crossed Hillman's face when his aunt's name was mentioned, succeeded by one of perplexity.

"Why, of course I don't," he answered. "I wasn't more than two years old then. What on earth are you driving at, Marston?"

"Into this turkey just at this moment," returned Frank. "But before I tell *you* much, Hillman, I think it only right that you should tell *me* what made you go off that way that night and not turn up again. Wouldn't even allow that dear old lady, your aunt, to hear from you. And she leaves the latch string out for you every night."

"Have you seen her? And when? And what did she say?"

Hillman bent forward over the table anxiously, and listened with close attention while Frank told about his visit to the little cottage in Red Ball, without explaining the object of it.

This recital seemed to thaw Webb completely.

"I *must* have seemed like a brute," he muttered.

"But how could I go back and tell her how weak I was? No, when I left you that night out there in the woods, it was with the resolve to cut loose entirely from the old life, and not allow any of the friends of that time to hear from me till I had proved I could be my own master by not touching a drop for a year. I had a little money with me, walked over to the other road, took a train for Jersey City, gave up my room there, and came at once out here, where I knew a chap who was great chums with me when we went to school together in Chelsea. But I found that he was dead, so I was left to struggle alone.

"And a struggle I had of it, I can tell you. I could get nothing to do, my money ran out, and two or three times starvation stared me in the face. Then I got this job, and a hard one it is; but I oughtn't to grumble, for what would have become of me if this hadn't turned up I don't dare think."

Hillman's discouraged tone, so different from what it used to be, touched Frank even more than his story, and impulsively he exclaimed: "Then you've fairly earned your good fortune, Frank Darnley!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

IN WHICH THE SCENES SHIFT RAPIDLY.

By the end of that dinner Webb Hillman had been made acquainted by Frank with all the particulars concerning the wonderful piece of luck that had befallen his friend, and which the latter now felt almost certain belonged of right to Hillman.

That the latter was amazed by the revelation may be readily imagined. He was dazed at first, and absolutely refused to believe it, but after Frank had told him about the two portraits and recalled to his mind how confused his aunt had been that night at tea when the subject of his father's occupation was broached, he began to grow excited and to ask questions eagerly.

"But who are you if this is true about me?" he wanted to know.

"And who are *you* if *I'm* the real Frank Darnley?" was the reply. "It's a poor rule that won't work both ways, you know."

"But proofs must be furnished," went on Webb. "How are they to be obtained if, as you say, that item

about me has been blotted out in the asylum book?"

"The Darnleys didn't have any proofs when they took me into the family."

"Then, as possession is nine points of the law, and as they couldn't do any better with me, you had better stay where you are."

"But I don't feel comfortable doing it, and feeling as if you had a better right to it."

"Well, wouldn't I be in exactly the same box?" rejoined Hillman. "No, no, Marston, you'd better go back and forget about me." The fellow heaved a sigh as he spoke, and reached for his hat. His hour was up.

"No, sir, I couldn't do it before, much less now, since I've seen you slaving away here like a dog. It will be the making of you to—to be surrounded by such influences. And as for me, I'm sure I can get back on the P. C. any time I want, and you know I enjoy the work. Here, I'll give you Dick's address. Come around there tonight, and we'll hold a family council on the matter. Remember, no dodging out of the way again. And one thing more. Promise me that you'll write to your aunt right off."

The two parted at the drum station, and Frank devoted the remainder of the afternoon to sightseeing, till it was time to return to Dick's.

till it was time to return to Dick's. But his eyes looked upon many things that he really saw not, so busy was his brain thinking over the future.

When he got back and told Sadie about meeting Hillman, "What did you tell him for, Rob?" she asked. "Now you have cut off all retreat."

"Perhaps I have," he answered soberly. "But he seemed so miserable—so grave to what he used to be, and he must have been through such hard lines—"

"That you allowed your heart to run away with your head," finished Sadie. "But as you say he declines to take up with the opening without proof, perhaps there's no harm done yet."

When Hillman arrived that night his beard had been shaved off and he looked "more like old times," as Frank put it.

"I have written to Aunt Priscilla," he announced.

"And told her you were coming home?" asked Frank.

"No, for that won't be decided until after our talk tonight."

The "talk" to which he referred was prolonged until a late hour, and a strange one it was—when it is recollected that the future stations in life, aye, even the very names of two who took part in it were at stake. And yet these two—Frank and Webb Hillman—were the coolest members of the quartette.

And another odd thing—Frank was arguing for Webb's interests and *vice versa*. The upshot of the whole thing was that Frank got Webb to agree to return East with him, he (Frank) paying the fare, and promising to secure Webb's reinstatement on the P. C. in case he did not turn out to be the heir of the Darnleys.

And so it was settled, Dick and Sadie parting from Frank with much regret, but realizing that he could not be contented anywhere with this doubt about the future hanging over him. Webb had telegraphed his aunt to expect him in Red Ball, where it was arranged he was to wait until the Darnleys were prepared to receive him.

Frank reached the mansion in Fifty-seventh Street on the 6th and received a royal welcome.

"We've missed you terribly, old fellow," said Fred. "Don't see how we got along so many years without you."

Mrs. Darnley, too, seemed so delighted to have him with her again that poor Frank's heart grew heavy in spite of him, as he reflected on the change that might be in store for them all.

"It isn't the money I care for," he told himself. "It's the feeling that I really belonged to somebody, that my name is my very own. And now when will

be the best time to make the plunge, tell the family all about it, and have the thing settled once for all?"

It couldn't very well be that night, as he found that Fred had arranged that the young people were all going to a dance, one of a series held at the Glee Club rooms.

"Tomorrow, then," Frank told himself, and proceeded to put on his dress suit with the odd reflection: "I wonder what will become of this in case—"

Then he resolutely cut off the end of the sentence and determined to think no more of the matter for that night at least. It was his first appearance at the Glee Club hall, and the decorations, the music, the smoothness of the floor, the beauty and vivacity of the girls he met—all were calculated to make him live wholly in the present.

He certainly was having a splendid time, and when he secured a cozy nook for his supper partner and they proceeded to discuss salads, ices, and the gossip of the ball-room together, he forgot for the time being that such a person as Robert Marston ever existed.

"Oh, do you know I heard something this afternoon that would work in splendidly for a plot to a story," remarked his partner, when he spilled some coffee he was carrying for her on the floor. "That just reminds me of it."

"What! My knocking over that coffee?"

"Yes, I'll tell you about it while I sip what's left. You see, I've got a friend who takes painting lessons from an artist down in Tenth Street, and she was telling me this afternoon about what one of the other girls told there yesterday morning. It seems that this other girl's grandfather used to be at the head of some asylum, and the other day a young man called on him to ask about the past history of an orphan that was adopted from there about fifteen years ago.—Why, Mr. Darnley, what's the matter with you tonight? You're dropping everything."

For Frank had suddenly let fall the spoon from his coffee-cup.

"I beg your pardon for interrupting," he said. "Pray go on."

"If you'll promise to be very good. Well, her grandfather sent her to hunt up a book that had all the records in it, and while they were looking at it the old gentleman upset the inkstand, and the ink ran all over the very place they wanted to see. And the young man went off and didn't leave any address, and my friend's friend thinks it's a shame, for he didn't give her a chance to tell that she had read over the note coming down stairs and knew just what it said. Oh—h!"

Frank had dropped cup, saucer, spoon and all this time.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

IN BANK STREET AGAIN.

"What must Miss Milnor have thought of me?" was the question Frank kept asking himself when he got home that night.

But really, he felt that he had sufficient cause for growing excited, learning that the solution of the problem that was such a cause of perplexity and indecision to him could be had by taking a simple journey to Bank Street.

Naturally he was feverishly impatient to get down there, but it did seem as if he would never be able to compass it. In the first place, Mrs. Darnley had planned to have him go with her the next morning and call on an old friend up in Harlem. Of course, this was something that could not be put off, and it completely filled the time till luncheon.

Then Eleanor came in with three tickets to a Daly matinee, at which she pleaded for Frank's escort, Fred of course being at the office.

"And it is so dark now when one comes out. Be-

sides," she added, "what is the use of college holidays if they don't give the fellows an opportunity to be obliging to their sisters?"

And so the afternoon went by and Frank scolded himself for not having written a note to Bank Street.

"But I can surely find time enough to run down there tonight before we start for the Farringtons'," he reflected.

"I'd better dress first, though," he decided, and as this took him half an hour, it was a quarter past eight before he got started.

"Hello, Frank," Fred called after him, "where are you going? You haven't forgotten about the Farringtons, have you?"

"No, I'll be back in time," answered Frank, struggling into his cape-coat, and the next minute he front door closed behind him.

It took all of half an hour to reach the Chusdies', so that it was half past eight when he rang the bell. The door was opened at once by a maid who must have been standing close beside it. She did not give Frank a chance to ask for anybody, but said immediately, "Third floor, back."

"Great Cæsar, they must be giving a party, and she thinks I've come to it!" thought Frank.

His first impulse was to turn around, apologize, and

go off. Then he remembered about the all-day trip to Tuxedo planned for the morrow, with the theater in the evening. "I can't possibly get off to come down then," he told himself. "And I *must* have the thing off my mind."

"Can't I see Mr. Chusdie for a moment?" he said, turning to the servant. "I can't stay; have another engagement."

"Lor, sir, Mr. Chusdie's off to Florida these three days," was the reply.

"Well, then, Miss—Amy will do," returned Frank, after an instant of perplexed thought.

"She's a dressin' for her part in the play," was the response to this. "It's just goin' ter begin now. If you'll step inside, sir, she'll be through pretty soon." As she spoke, the maid threw open the parlor door. The room was crowded with people, all seated on camp chairs ranged theater fashion in rows facing the back room, which was shut off from the other by the closed folding doors. In front of the latter a board stood on edge on the floor, and between it and the folding doors were ranged six small lamps, to serve as footlights.

Frank hesitated. He did not like to intrude in this manner, and yet he was terribly anxious to see Miss Amy. And while he was debating, the servant had

shut the door on him, a bell had rung, and the folding doors were pushed apart.

He recognized the girl whom he wanted to see, sitting at a spinning wheel, dressed in Puritan style. She said a few words of her part, with her eyes downcast, and then, gaining confidence, looked out once or twice over the audience. And in one of these glances she took in Frank.

She stopped in the midst of her speech, and for an instant Frank thought that he had broken her up. He felt extremely uncomfortable, as may be imagined, especially as many among the audience followed the direction of the young girl's gaze and turned around to look at him. Indeed, he heard more than one whisper of "Who is he? Do you know?"

Frank certainly did present a marked contrast to the others in the parlor, still bundled up in his overcoat as he was, with his red silk muffler wound around his throat. But he stood the ordeal as gracefully as he could, and as the young girl had now regained her composure and was proceeding with her part, the attention of all was soon turned again toward the stage.

Meantime the minutes were slipping away, ticked off by a marble and gilt clock in a glass case on the mantel, and Frank was on pins and needles for impatience. How long was this play going to last, he

asked himself? It was ten minutes to nine now—ah, there go the sliding doors, the play is over—not one word of it has he taken in understandingly—and Frank hastens out into the hall again.

But he seemed to be no more impatient than Miss Amy was herself, for still in her becoming Puritan costume, she went at once from the stage and was starting for the front parlor when Frank met her.

“Oh, I’m so glad to see you,” she exclaimed, just as if they were old friends, although she didn’t put out her hand. “Did you hear something about it? And is that why you came tonight? I forgot everything for a minute when I saw you.”

Frank explained briefly how he had learned about the girl’s knowledge of what that blotted-out entry in the asylum book contained, adding: “Can you tell me now, in two minutes, what it was?”

“Yes, it said that the boy Webster Clarke had been brought to the asylum by an old woman from Westchester County, who said that he was her grandson, that his parents were dead, and all his other relatives; that she herself was supported by charity, and that some people in her town had advised her to bring the boy to an asylum, where he could have better care. Then it said that he was adopted soon afterward by Mrs. Priscilla Hillman of New Jersey.”

"Thank you ever so much!" exclaimed Frank, as the girl paused for breath. "I won't keep you a minute longer. Your friends will think—"

"But you will come again and let me know how it turns out, won't you?" she called after him when his hand was already on the front door knob.

"Yes," he just gave himself time to answer, then shut the door behind him and was out in the night with his deep gratitude.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE KEY TO THE MYSTERY.

For the remainder of that night Frank's mind was more at ease than it had been for weeks past, but by the next morning he realized that as yet his work was only half done, and the portion that remained was of a nature that he shrank deeply from entering upon. This was nothing more nor less than an interview on the subject with Mrs. Darnley.

The presence of Webb Hillman's photograph in the family album at Midway must be explained, and she was the one who was certain to know most about it. And yet to broach the matter seemed like opening a healed wound.

"Mother," he said the next morning at breakfast, "can I see you in the library for a few moments?"

"Certainly, my son, for as long as you like. Come, we will go there now if you like."

So the two adjourned to the handsome apartment that had been Frank's favorite nook in the big house, and having seated her in the easiest chair and brought

a footstool for her feet, he established himself on an ottoman at her side and began:

"Mother, do you remember the album that rests on a little table in the parlor bay-window in the Midway house?"

"Yes, certainly. It is a very old one, and I sometimes think we should take better care of it than to leave it out that way while we are in town. But why do you ask, Frank?"

"Because I want to know who that little boy is, whose picture is on the third or fourth page, I think."

Frank's tone was even, but a glance at the muscles in his neck would have shown that it cost him a struggle to keep it so.

"A little boy near the first of the album!" said Mrs. Darnley, musingly. "Let me think. What did he look like?"

"Oh, he was a very nice looking little fellow, with big eyes, and—"

"Oh, yes, I know now," and Mrs. Darnley sighed as she spoke. "It was a fancy of your poor father's about you."

"About me?" exclaimed Frank in surprise.

"Yes; you see, we had never had any photographs of you taken and—and when we lost you we had nothing by which to remember you. Well, once when your

father had come to New York on a business trip he visited an orphan asylum here in the city. He had often talked to me about adopting a boy, and this time he saw a little fellow that struck his fancy in the asylum and had his picture taken so as to bring one out to me. I liked it, and we wrote to arrange about taking him, but we were just too late. Some one else had carried him off before us. We kept the picture, though, and your father used to enjoy looking at it and imagining it was little Frank. Poor man, if he could but have lived to see you restored to us!"

Mrs. Darnley placed her hand affectionately on Frank's head as she added this last, and he felt that he could not be too thankful for the fact that he had not allowed her to share in those fears which her words had now shown to be groundless. But:

"Why did you ask me about this, Frank?" she added. "It seems odd that the picture should have made an impression on you."

"Not when I tell you that I know the original, does it?"

"You know the original!" exclaimed Mrs. Darnley, and her amazement was great.

"Yes, he is a man now, of course, but I saw a picture like that of him when he was a small boy. And you never knew that he was living very near you in Midway—a little place called Red Ball?"

"Is this really so?" Mrs. Darnley was greatly interested, and would not be satisfied until Frank had told her all he knew of Webb Hillman, omitting, of course, all reference to the theory he had framed as to his connection with her family.

"I wish we could use whatever influence we have to get him back on the P. C.," he concluded.

"Of course we will," returned Mrs. Darnley. "And I want you to bring him up here to see me. You say he seemed like a nice refined fellow, so I think that if you should keep up your friendship for him it would be a great help to him in overcoming his terrible appetite for liquor."

So it was arranged that Frank should run over to Philadelphia the next morning, have an interview with the superintendent of the railroad, and on his way back stop at Red Ball. He would have just time to attend to all this before college re-opened.

His talk with the superintendent resulted satisfactorily, and he took the noon train for Chelsea, where he hired a horse and buggy and started on his drive for the little cottage in Red Ball. Absorbed in meditation on the strange and happy happenings of fortune, he paid but little attention to his surroundings, merely noting where he was sufficiently to guide the horse aright. He therefore took no note that he was pass-

ing the Frame farm until a hail in a familiar voice roused him from his reverie.

"Hello there, Rob! Aren't you going to speak to a fellow?"

The words were almost the same the speaker had used four months before, when he to whom they were addressed was making his way from the front to the rear of his car.

"Why, George, I'm awfully glad to see you."

Frank drew rein and extended his hand to greet the fellow who had taken a flying leap over the fence to intercept him.

"Well, I'm surprised that you are. I thought that you'd clean forgotten your old friends, you'd fallen so in love with your shiny buttons." ("Hullo," thought Frank. "He can't have heard.") "But why didn't you let a fellow hear from you? You might have been crushed between car-bumpers for all we knew."

"I've been terribly busy," Frank began to explain, wondering just how he would set the new order of things before George, "and then I've been to Chicago."

"To Chicago!" echoed the other, climbing into the buggy, taking the reins, and starting to drive the horse into the yard. "Why, how could you get off to do all that?"

"Oh, I'm not braking any more; didn't you know it?" remarked Frank, adding quickly: "But here, what are you doing? I can't stop now. I've got to catch a train back to New York this afternoon."

"To New York!" exclaimed George. "And you've given up braking! What are you doing, then?"

Young Frame dropped the reins and stared in the wildest surprise at his friend, who seemed to enjoy the events.

"Going to college," answered Frank quietly; and then, deciding that it was best to take the bull by the horns at the very outset, he went on rapidly: "It's a long story, George, and I can only give you the main points now, which are that my name isn't Robert Marston, but Frank Darnley; I've got a mother, a brother, and two sisters, and—"

"Look here, get somebody to introduce me, won't you?"

George had jumped out and stood by the fence, limp with amazement. Then, after a pause, he went on: "What did I always tell you, Rob—excuse me, Frank—about your being a prince in disguise? And now if it hasn't come true—or you wouldn't be going to college, running out to Chicago, and trotting round the country with such a turnout as you're sporting now!"

"Perhaps it has," answered Frank. "But I can tell you one thing, George—it hasn't at any time made me any happier than I was when I got the post of braking on the P. C. Stick a pin in that, my boy, and keep it for reference when you think money makes happiness. I'll send for you to come in and see me soon. Then I'll tell you the particulars. Now, I must hurry along. Good by, old fellow;" and so saying Frank drove on, leaving George still braced against the fence, looking after the vanishing carriage as if it were really the pumpkin coach which took Cinderella to the ball.

* * * * *

Frank's visit to the little cottage at Red Ball was one of the pleasantest episodes of his life under the new name. He found the old lady quite overjoyed to get her boy back again, and to see Webb's look of content when he was told that he would be received back on the railroad was worth all the inconvenience to which Frank had been put to bring it about.

Hillman demurred at first about going to see Mrs. Darnley, but was finally prevailed upon to do so, and made as pleasing a first impression on Frank's mother as he had on Frank himself.

And so Frank's Christmas vacation came to an end, and he returned to his studies at Columbia with renewed zest. He did not forget his promise to George

Frame, but appointed an early date for his country friend to spend Sunday with him.

And when George arrived at the Fifty-seventh Street mansion he was positively awed by the splendor of it, and went back to Westford to spread the most marvelous reports of "Rob Marston's luck."

And how was it with Frank himself? Was it really true that he was no happier than he had been when he had been Rob Marston and flagman on the P. C. R.? Well, sometimes he isn't, and yet, strangely enough, he feels that it is at these times that he ought to be the happiest, for it proves, as he claims, that money isn't the key to contentment, after all. And in a country of such changes as this is, a fact of this nature is a comforting one to remember.

Before Spring Frank visited the hotel where he had had his startling adventure, ascertained where Mrs. Opdyke lived in Connecticut, and soon found an opportunity to run up there and pay her a visit, to the delight of the old lady's heart. For Frank told her his whole history, and made her vastly proud of the confidence reposed in her.

As for Miss Amy, you may be sure that he did not forget to make his promised call in Bank Street—in fact, he is still calling there.

THE END.

WHITE-FACED DICK.

A STORY OF PINE-TREE GULCH.

How Pine-tree Gulch got its name no one knew, for in the early days every ravine and hillside was thickly covered with pines. It may be that a tree of exceptional size caught the eye of the first explorer, that he camped under it, and named the place in its honor; or, may be, some fallen giant lay in the bottom and hindered the work of the first prospectors. At any rate, Pine-tree Gulch it was, and the name was as good as any other. The pine-trees were gone now. Cut up for firing, or for the erection of huts, or the construction of sluices, but the hillside was ragged with their stumps.

The principal camp was at the mouth of the Gulch, where the little stream, which scarce afforded water sufficient for the cradles in the dry season, but which was a rushing torrent in winter, joined the Yuba. The best ground was at the junction of the streams, and lay, indeed, in the Yuba Valley rather than in the Gulch. At first most gold had been found higher up, but there was here comparatively little depth down to the bed-rock, and as the ground became ex-

hausted the miners moved down towards the mouth of the Gulch. They were doing well, as a whole, how well no one knew, for miners are chary of giving information as to what they are making; still, it was certain they were doing well, for the bars were doing a roaring trade, and the storekeepers never refused credit—a proof in itself that the prospects were good.

The flat at the mouth of the Gulch was a busy scene, every foot was good-paying stuff, for in the eddy, where the torrents in winter rushed down into the Yuba, the gold had settled down and lay thick among the gravel. But most of the parties were sinking, and it was a long way down to the bed-rock; for the hills on both sides sloped steeply, and the Yuba must here at one time have rushed through a narrow gorge, until, in some wild freak, it brought down millions of tons of gravel, and resumed its course seventy feet above its former level.

A quarter of a mile higher up a ledge of rock ran across the valley, and over it in the old time the Yuba had poured in a cascade seventy feet deep into the ravine. But the rock now was level with the gravel, only showing its jagged points here and there above it. This ledge had been invaluable to the diggers: without it they could only have sunk their shafts with the greatest difficulty, for the gravel would have been full of water, and even with the greatest pains in puddling and timber-work the

pumps would scarcely have sufficed to keep it down as it rose in the bottom of the shafts. But the miners had made common cause together, and giving each so many ounces of gold or so many days' work had erected a dam thirty feet high along the ledge of rock, and had cut a channel for the Yuba along the lower slopes of the valley. Of course, when the rain set in, as everybody knew, the dam would go, and the river diggings must be abandoned till the water subsided and a fresh dam was made; but there were two months before them yet, and everyone hoped to be down to the bed-rock before the water interrupted their work.

The hillside, both in the Yuba Valley and for some distance along Pine-tree Gulch, was dotted by shanties and tents; the former constructed for the most part of logs roughly squared, the walls being some three feet in height, on which the sharp sloping roof was placed, thatched in the first place with boughs, and made all snug, perhaps, with an old sail stretched over all. The camp was quiet enough during the day. The few women were away with their washing at the pools, a quarter of a mile up the Gulch, and the only persons to be seen about were the men told off for cooking for their respective parties.

But in the evening the camp was lively. Groups of men in red shirts and corded trousers tied at the knee, in high boots, sat round blazing fires, and talked of their prospects or discussed the news of the

luck at other camps. The sound of music came from two or three plank erections which rose conspicuously above the huts of the diggers, and were bright externally with the glories of white and colored paints. To and from these men were always sauntering, and it needed not the clink of glasses and the sound of music to tell that they were the bars of the camp.

Here, standing at the counter, or seated at numerous small tables, men were drinking villainous liquor, smoking and talking, and paying but scant attention to the strains of the fiddle or the accordion, save when some well-known air was played, when all would join in a boisterous chorus. Some were always passing in or out of a door which led into a room behind. Here there was comparative quiet, for men were gambling, and gambling high.

Going backwards and forwards with liquors into the gambling-room of the Imperial Saloon, which stood just where Pine-tree Gulch opened into Yuba Valley, was a lad, whose appearance had earned for him the name of White-faced Dick.

White-faced Dick was not one of those who had done well at Pine-tree Gulch; he had come across the plains with his father, who had died when halfway over, and Dick had been thrown on the world to shift for himself. Nature had not intended him for the work, for he was a delicate, timid lad; what spirits he originally had having been years before beaten

out of him by a brutal father. So far, indeed, Dick was the better rather than the worse for the event which had left him an orphan.

They had been traveling with a large party for mutual security against Indians and Mormons, and so long as the journey lasted Dick had got on fairly well. He was always ready to do odd jobs, and as the draught cattle were growing weaker and weaker, and every pound of weight was of importance, no one grudged him his rations in return for his services; but when the company began to descend the slopes of the Sierra Nevada they began to break up, going off by twos and threes to the diggings of which they heard such glowing accounts. Some, however, kept straight on to Sacramento, determining there to obtain news as to the doings at all the different places, and then to choose that which seemed to them to offer the surest prospects of success.

Dick proceeded with them to the town, and there found himself alone. His companions were absorbed in the busy rush of population, and each had so much to provide and arrange for, that none gave a thought to the solitary boy. However, at that time no one who had a pair of hands, however feeble, to work need starve in Sacramento, and for some weeks Dick hung around the town doing odd jobs, and then, having saved a few dollars, determined to try his luck at the diggings, and started on foot with

a shovel on his shoulders and a few days' provisions slung across it.

Arrived at his destination, the lad soon discovered that gold-digging was hard work for brawny and seasoned men, and after a few feeble attempts in spots abandoned as worthless he gave up the effort, and again began to drift; and even in Pine-tree Gulch it was not difficult to get a living. At first he tried rocking cradles, but the work was far harder than it appeared. He was standing ankle-deep in water from morning till night, and his cheeks grew paler, and his strength, instead of increasing, seemed to fade away. Still, there were jobs within his strength. He could keep a fire alight and watch a cooking-pot, he could carry up buckets of water or wash a flannel shirt, and so he struggled on, until at last some kind-hearted man suggested to him that he should try to get a place at the new saloon which was about to be opened.

"You are not fit for this work, young 'un, and you ought to be at home with your mother; if you like I will go up with you this evening to Jeffries. I knew him down on the flats, and I dare say he will take you on. I don't say as a saloon is a good place for a boy, still you will always get your bellyful of victuals and a dry place to sleep in, if it's only under a table. What do you say?"

Dick thankfully accepted the offer, and on Red George's recommendation was that evening en-

gaged. His work was not hard now, for till the miners knocked off there was little doing in the saloon; a few men would come in for a drink at dinner-time, but it was not until the lamps were lit that business began in earnest, and then for four or five hours Dick was busy.

A rougher or healthier lad would not have minded the work, but to Dick it was torture; every nerve in his body thrilled whenever rough miners cursed him for not carrying out their orders more quickly, or for bringing them the wrong liquors, which, as his brain was in a whirl with the noise, the shouting, and the multiplicity of orders, happened frequently. He might have fared worse had not Red George always stood his friend, and Red George was an authority in Pine-tree Gulch—powerful in frame, reckless in bearing and temper, he had been in a score of fights and had come off them, if not unscathed, at least victorious. He was notoriously a lucky digger, but his earnings went as fast as they were made, and he was always ready to open his belt and give a bountiful pinch of dust to any mate down on his luck.

“One evening Dick was more helpless and confused than usual. The saloon was full, and he had been shouted at and badgered and cursed until he scarcely knew what he was doing. High play was going on in the saloon, and a good many men were clustered round the table. Red George was having

a run of luck, and there was a big pile of gold dust on the table before him. One of the gamblers who was losing had ordered old rye, and instead of bringing it to him, Dick brought a tumbler of hot liquor which someone else had called for. With an oath the man took it up and threw it in his face.

"You cowardly hound!" Red George exclaimed. "Are you man enough to do that to a man?"

"You bet," the gambler, who was a new arrival at Pine-tree Gulch, replied; and picking up an empty glass, he hurled it at Red George. The bystanders sprang aside, and in a moment the two men were facing each other with outstretched pistols. The two reports rung out simultaneously: Red George sat down unconcernedly with a streak of blood flowing down his face, where the bullet had cut a furrow in his cheek; the stranger fell back with a bullet hole in the center of his forehead.

The body was carried outside, and the play continued as if no interruption had taken place. They were accustomed to such occurrences in Pine-tree Gulch, and the piece of ground at the top of the hill, that had been set aside as a burial place, was already dotted thickly with graves, filled in almost every instance by men who had died, in the local phraseology, "with their boots on."

Neither then nor afterwards did Red George allude to the subject to Dick, whose life after this signal instance of his championship was easier than

it had hitherto been, for there were few in Pine-tree Gulch who cared to excite Red George's anger; and strangers going to the place were sure to receive a friendly warning that it was best for their health to keep their tempers over any shortcomings on the part of White-faced Dick.

Grateful as he was for Red George's interference on his behalf, Dick felt the circumstance which had ensued more than anyone else in the camp. With others it was the subject of five minutes' talk, but Dick could not get out of his head the thought of the dead man's face as he fell back. He had seen many such frays before, but he was too full of his own troubles for them to make much impression upon him. But in the present case he felt as if he himself was responsible for the death of the gambler; if he had not blundered this would not have happened.

He wondered whether the dead man had a wife and children, and, if so, were they expecting his return? Would they ever hear where he had died, and how?

But this feeling, which, tired out as he was when the time came for closing the bar, often prevented him from sleeping for hours, in no way lessened his gratitude and devotion towards Red George, and he felt that he could die willingly if his life would benefit his champion. Sometimes he thought, too, that his life would not be much to give, for, in spite of shelter and food, the cough which he had caught

while working in the water still clung to him, and as his employer said to him angrily one day:

“Your victuals don’t do you no good, Dick; you get thinner and thinner, and folks will think as I starve you. Darned if you aint a disgrace to the establishment.”

The wind was whistling down the gorges, and the clouds hung among the pine-woods which still clothed the upper slopes of the hills, and the diggers, as they turned out one morning, looked up apprehensively.

“But it could not be,” they assured each other. Everyone knew that the rains were not due for another month yet; it could only be a passing shower if it rained at all.

But as the morning went on, men came in from camps higher up the river, and reports were current that it had been raining for the last two days among the upper hills; while those who took the trouble to walk across to the new channel could see for themselves at noon that it was filled very nigh to the brim, the water rushing along with thick and turbid current. But those who repeated the rumors, or who reported that the channel was full, were summarily put down. Men would not believe that such a calamity as a flood and the destruction of all their season’s work could be impending. There had been some showers, no doubt, as there had often been before, but it was ridiculous to talk of anything like

rain a month before its time. Still, in spite of these assertions, there was uneasiness at Pine-tree Gulch, and men looked at the driving clouds above and shook their heads before they went down to the shafts to work after dinner.

When the last customer had left and the bar was closed, Dick had nothing to do till evening, and he wandered outside and sat down on a stump, at first looking at the work going on in the valley, then so absorbed in his own thoughts that he noticed nothing, not even the driving mist which presently set in. He was calculating that he had, with his savings from his wages and what had been given him by the miners, laid by eighty dollars. When he got another hundred and twenty he would go; he would make his way down to San Francisco, and then by ship to Panama and up to New York, and then west again to the village where he was born. There would be people there who would know him, and who would give him work for his mother's sake. He did not care what it was; anything would be better than this.

Then his thoughts came back to Pine-tree Gulch, and he started to his feet. Could he be mistaken? Were his eyes deceiving him? No; among the stones and boulders of the old bed of the Yuba there was the gleam of water, and even as he watched it he could see it widening out. He started to run down the hill to give the alarm, but before he was

halfway he paused, for there were loud shouts, and a scene of bustle and confusion instantly arose.

The cradles were deserted, and the men working on the surface loaded themselves with their tools and made for the high ground, while those at the windlasses worked their hardest to draw up their comrades below. A man coming down from above stopped close to Dick, with a low cry, and stood gazing with a white scared face. Dick had worked with him; he was one of the company to which Red George belonged.

"What is it, Saunders?"

"My God! they are lost!" the man replied. "I was at the windlass when they shouted up to me to go up and fetch them a bottle of rum. They had just struck it rich, and wanted a drink on the strength of it."

Dick understood at once. Red George and his mates were still in the bottom of the shaft, ignorant of the danger which was threatening them.

"Come on," he cried; "we shall be in time yet," and at the top of his speed dashed down the hill, followed by Saunders.

"What is it, what is it?" asked parties of men mounting the hill.

"Red George's gang are still below."

Dick's eyes were fixed on the water. There was a broad band now of yellow with a white edge down the center of the stony flat, and it was widening with

terrible rapidity. It was scarce ten yards from the windlass at the top of Red George's shaft when Dick, followed closely by Saunders, reached it.

"Come up, mates; quick, for your lives! The river is rising; you will be flooded out directly. Everyone else has gone!"

As he spoke he pulled at the rope by which the bucket was hanging, and the handles of the windlass flew round rapidly as it descended. When it had run out Dick and he grasped the handles.

"All right below?"

An answering call came up, and the two began their work, throwing their whole strength into it. Quickly as the windlass revolved it seemed an endless time to Dick before the bucket came up, and the first man stepped out. It was not Red George. Dick had hardly expected it would be. Red George would be sure to see his two mates up before him, and the man uttered a cry of alarm as he saw the water, now within a few feet of the mouth of the shaft.

It was a torrent now, for not only was it coming through the dam, but it was rushing down in cascades from the new channel. Without a word the miner placed himself facing Dick, and the moment the bucket was again down, the three grasped the handles. But quickly as they worked, the edge of the water was within a few inches of the shaft when the next man reached the surface; but again the

bucket descended before the rope tightened. However, the water had begun to run over the lip—at first, in a mere trickle, and then, almost instantaneously, in a cascade, which grew larger and larger.

The bucket was halfway up when a sound like thunder was heard, the ground seemed to tremble under their feet, and then at the turn of the valley above, a great wave of yellow water, crested with foam, was seen tearing along at the speed of a race-horse.

“The dam has burst!” Saunders shouted. “Run for your lives, or we are all lost!”

The three men dropped the handles and ran at full speed towards the shore, while loud shouts to Dick to follow came from the crowd of men standing on the slope. But the boy grasped the handles, and with lips tightly closed, still toiled on. Slowly the bucket ascended, for Red George was a heavy man; then suddenly the weight slackened, and the handle went round faster. The shaft was filling, the water had reached the bucket, and had risen to Red George’s neck, so that his weight was no longer on the rope. So fast did the water pour in, that it was not half a minute before the bucket reached the surface, and Red George sprang out. There was but time for one exclamation, and then the great wave struck them. Red George was whirled like a straw in the current; but he was a strong swimmer,

and at a point where the valley widened out, half a mile lower, he struggled to shore.

Two days later the news reached Pine-tree Gulch that a boy's body had been washed ashore twenty miles down, and ten men, headed by Red George, went and brought it solemnly back to Pine-tree Gulch. There among the stumps of pine trees a grave was dug, and there, in the presence of the whole camp, White-faced Dick was laid to rest.

Pine-tree Gulch is a solitude now, the trees are growing again, and none would dream that it was once a busy scene of industry; but if the traveler searches among the pine trees he will find a stone with the words:

"Here lies White-faced Dick, who died to save Red George. 'What can a man do more than give his life for a friend?'"

The text was the suggestion of an ex-clergyman working as a miner in Pine-tree Gulch.

Red George worked no more at the diggings, but, after seeing the stone laid in its place, went east, and with what little money came to him when the common fund of the company was divided after the flood on the Yuba, bought a small farm, and settled down there; but to the end of his life he was never weary of telling those who would listen to it the story of Pine-tree Gulch.

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